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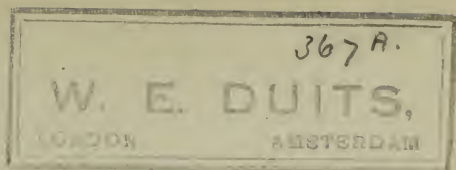
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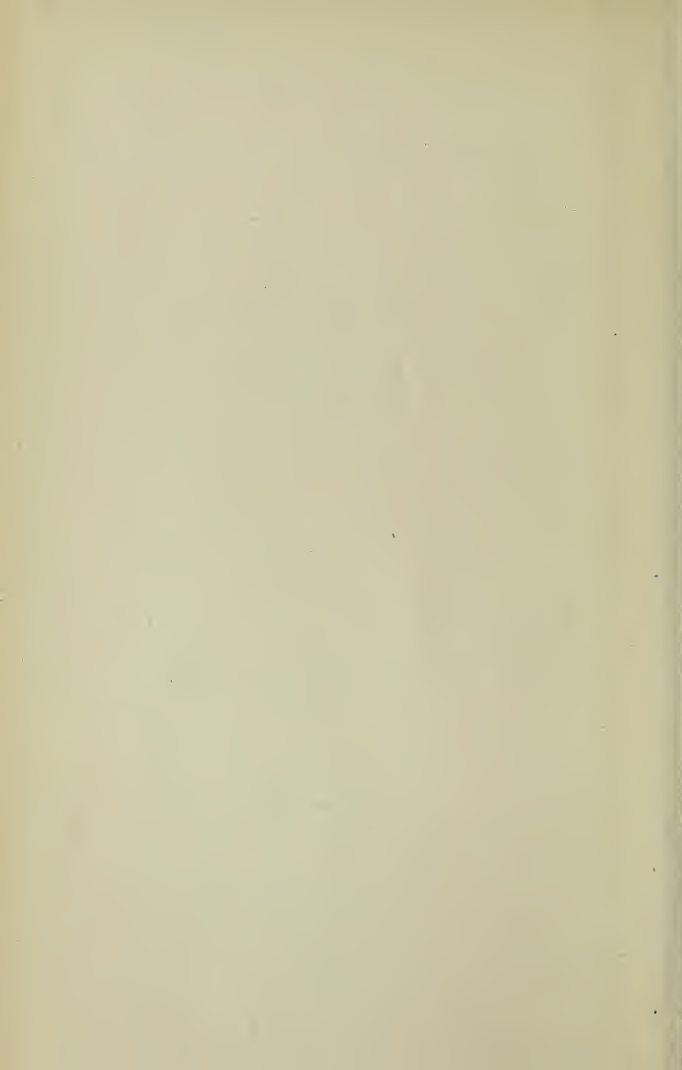
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HARLEQUIN AND COLUMBINE (WALLACE COLLECTION)

*Photograph, Mansell & Co.*

# ANTOINE WATTEAU

(1684-1721)

BY

CAMILLE MAUCLAIR



LONDON: DUCKWORTH & CO.  
NEW YORK: E. P. DUTTON & CO.

*Translated from the French text of Monsieur  
Camille Maucclair by Madame Simon Bussy*

TURNBULL AND SPEARS, PRINTERS, EDINBURGH



To

MY FRIEND

SIMON BUSSY

POET OF LANDSCAPE PAINTING

I AFFECTIONATELY DEDICATE

THIS BOOK

C. M.



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## PREFACE

THIS brief study does not pretend to analyse the deepest secrets of Antoine Watteau's art, soul, and genius. My strict duty as a biographer obliges me to omit none of the chief circumstances of the artist's life—none, at any rate, which help to throw any light on his work, or to define its meaning and conditions. The object and the format of this series compel me to restrict myself to generalities. It is, moreover, impossible to display any brilliant erudition in relating the story of so well-known an existence, which has been told in many previous books with abundant documentary evidence, and especially in the *Memoir of the Comte de Caylus*, a work which leaves no room for further research. I have therefore confined myself to summarising the most significant features of Watteau's life; but this, together with the analysis of his works and technique, takes up the greater part of my book.

## PREFACE

After accomplishing my duty towards the public, there remained, however, a duty towards myself—the duty of pronouncing a personal opinion on Watteau's work and on his place in the French school. After recapitulating what has already been said about him, my task consisted in attempting to give some usefulness and originality to this book by deducing an individual conclusion. I have thus tried to add to the existing idea of Watteau some elements of comprehension and appreciation which had hitherto passed unnoticed. The only excuse for a work of this kind is that it should endeavour to take a step forward in the study of an eminent personality. The analysis of a great mind—similar in this respect to the mysteries of nature—can never be completed. In the progress of science, the further back the limits of the unknown are pushed, the more mysteries are discovered hidden behind those which have been elucidated, mysteries whose very existence is unsuspected by ignorance, to whom all things seem simple. To the eyes of science, however, fresh objects of research incessantly arise—and thus it is with genius. The more it is scrutinised and

## PREFACE

the further back its limits are pushed, the wider is the field for investigation. The duty of the critic, even in a slight work of popularisation such as this, is to go further than his predecessors, and to make it possible for his successors to go further in their turn, by suggesting fresh subjects for inquiry. I have therefore considered by what means I could best indicate such subjects, and I have come to the conclusion that I cannot pretend to add anything to the erudite exegesis of a career, the evolution of which has already been traced with great minuteness; nor can I extort from the signification of the pictures themselves the occasion for a brilliant and literary argument. I have therefore taken up a standpoint which it will be well for me to explain at once. I have often remarked with surprise how little heed is paid, by those who study great artists, to their physiology. Though biographers may mention their illnesses and physical habits, the art critic seems to establish no correlation between these facts and the style and expression of the artists' works themselves. While reflecting upon Watteau, one of the painters whose spell I have felt the most intensely, it

## PREFACE

has occurred to me to wonder whether logic does not demand that a close parallel should be drawn between his physiological state and the spirit of his pictures, which would appear to be its direct consequence.

For this reason, after completing the account of Watteau's life and works with all the care that can be demanded of a biographer, historian, and art critic, I have endeavoured to explain the essential meaning of this great painter's art by that disease of consumption which brought him prematurely to the grave at the age of thirty-seven. The specially intellectual character of this terrible malady induced me to seek in this quarter elements of criticism which are not generally made use of. Private circumstances put it in my power to study during several years the action of consumption on the imagination, and the effect of this strange illness on the artistic organism, sensibility, character, and work. I was thus enabled to observe in Watteau the symptoms of this influence, and to recognise in this celebrated, but to my mind somewhat misunderstood painter, characteristics common to a whole series of consumptive artists of the nineteenth



SAVOYARD WITH HIS MARMOT' (HERMITAGE GALLERY)

*Photograph, Braun, Clément & Cie, Dornach, Paris, and New York*

## PREFACE

century, whose exceptional art was the cerebral product of pulmonary disease, and who found in this malady, not only their death, but the secret of their admirable, strange, and pathetic poetry.

I am well aware that by introducing such speculations into art criticism I may cause some astonishment. I have no pretensions to establish any invariable and methodical relationship between physiology and imagination, though this has been often attempted by psychologists. Such arid dissertations will not be found in this slight work. Nevertheless Watteau is not what he seems, and above all not what he seemed in the eyes of his contemporaries. Like Chardin and La Tour he stands aloof from his generation, a lonely soul, a dominant figure. He has been praised for the charming "outwardness" of his talent, and perhaps the inward signification that underlies his decorative effects has passed unheeded. At any rate the school that directly followed Watteau in the eighteenth century proves, by its graceful superficiality, how far Lancret and Pater were from suspecting the special quality of the genius whose

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melancholy and almost metaphysical dreaminess were bound to escape the comprehension of such a period.

It does not appear that later writers on Watteau have sought in the story of his unhappy life and illness motives for a different judgment. The connection between the work and the sick man who produced it seems to have struck them not at all. They have scarce so much as recognised in Watteau a kind of "morbidezza" which differentiates him from other painters of "scènes galantes," and it has not occurred to them to wonder at the contrast between his sombre temperament and the light, brilliant, and amorous complexion of his painting. They have not perceived in this contrast an opportunity for intellectual research, nor been led to discover that his production was sad in signification, and the *illustration* of the "soul-side" of a confirmed consumptive.

I have therefore pursued my investigations in this direction. My first intuition as to Watteau's art dates from long ago; but ever since those earliest visits to the Louvre as a young man, I have always felt that his was an



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art of intense sadness, different in every way from what was generally said of it. With advancing years I have been able to make sure that in reality Watteau was no "petit-mâitre," no painter of gay and laughing scenes, but that underneath this decorative exterior lay a great soul that had drunk deep of the mysterious poison of despair, a soul that had been stricken by what has been called the "malady of the infinite." I have thus come to see in Watteau the prototype of a whole series of modern artists, or at anyrate the extraordinary painter of those scenes in which wander the dreams of all great consumptives.

This is what makes Watteau inimitable. This is the reason he seems so peculiarly individual that none of his successors, skilful as they were in his manner, have ever been able to catch one particle of his soul. This is the reason that this isolated figure of the eighteenth century is as modern as one of our own contemporaries.

The thesis has never yet been advanced. I hope to have justified it in this volume by a few cogent arguments. I have pondered over it for many years before submitting it to the





THE EMBARKMENT FOR CYTHERA (RIGHT-HAND PORTION)  
(BERLIN ACADEMY)

*Photograph, Braun, Clément & Cie, Dornach, Paris, and New York*

## PREFACE

public, waiting for my conviction to be established securely enough to prevent any suspicion of paradox.

I have in no wise yielded to the pleasure of putting forward a paradox on Watteau, or of enhancing the interest of my work by such facile means. It would be unworthy a great artist to make him subservient to such ends. On the contrary, I think I have neither forced the meaning of his works, nor travestied his existence, but have simply gone to the root of things by basing my criticism on physiology and saying what I see, and what, it seems to me, others have not seen.

It is only my sincerity that I need here defend. The public will judge of the validity of my arguments, and I will detain it no longer. I wish only to utter one word of warning as to the unpleasant impression that may be created by this introduction of disease into the consideration of an artist's work. It is unnecessary to take the word "disease" in a pejorative sense. Disease is a condition, not necessarily a blemish. It may intensify as well as paralyse, be an influence for good as well as for evil on a man's imagination and talent. It seems in

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especial to favour greatly the manifestation of a certain kind of genius. It is permissible to think that without it neither Watteau, nor Novalis, nor Bonington, nor Chopin, nor any other mind of this lineage would have been what we admire. The glowing precocity of their youthful blossoming was worth the slowly ripening wisdom of healthier temperaments, and the savour of death mingles with their beauty without corrupting it.



## I

Watteau's birth—His early life at Valenciennes—His poverty in Paris—Works with Gillot: origin of pictures drawn from Italian comedy—Works at ornament painting with Audran—First military pictures—Returns to Valenciennes—Second stay in Paris—Competes for the Prix de Rome—His election to the Academy.

THE only known documents relative to Watteau's life were a few succinct notes in d'Argenville's "*Abrégé de la vie des plus fameux peintres*," in Gersaint's "*Catalogues d'estampes*,"<sup>1</sup> and in M. de Julienne's prefatory notice to a collection of Watteau's etchings and drawings, when, by a lucky chance, the brothers de Goncourt discovered a "*Life of Watteau*," written by the Comte de Caylus and presented by him to the Royal Academy of Painting and Sculpture. To this life were subjoined a certain number of re-

<sup>1</sup> Notice inserted by the picture dealer Gersaint into the catalogue of the Quentin de Lorangère collection.

## ANTOINE WATTEAU

ports, speeches, and Academicians' biographies, which for some unknown reason had been omitted from the official proceedings of the *Ecole des Beaux Arts*. The Comte de Caylus read his *Memoir* at a sitting of the Academy on February 3rd, 1748; Charles Coypel answered, and Lépicié, in his capacity of secretary, countersigned the minutes of the meeting according to custom. We may dismiss Caylus' personal appreciations, which are stamped with the grossest want of artistic comprehension. He evidently totally failed to grasp the genius of the man with whom he had been acquainted, and the praise he bestows on him, accompanied as it is by continual reservations, would at the best be applicable to a trifling third-rate painter. But the documentary evidence furnished by this work gives it the highest importance. By collating it with the scanty information furnished by Gersaint, Mariette, and M. de Julienne, we can reconstitute in detail the career of this extraordinary man, who was never estimated at his true worth during his lifetime, and who came near to being completely overwhelmed by the great whirlwind of scornful oblivion into

## ANTOINE WATTEAU

which he was cast, together with the rest of the eighteenth century painters, by the school of David and Ingres, till about the year 1865.

The "Life of Watteau," so fortunately recovered by the Goncourts (those ardent defenders of eighteenth century art, who, indeed, almost exhumed it out of ashes, like the untarnished paintings of Pompeii), is thus our most trustworthy document, and thanks to it alone we are able to-day to form an accurate idea of Watteau's brief and unhappy existence. Caylus knew him well, and has left us a minute analysis of his character and methods. The portions of his work that deal with Watteau's technique may as often as not be disregarded on account of their incompetence and the prejudice by which they are dictated, but those which concern his character and illness are of the deepest interest, and we shall make use of them in order to establish the conclusions of this volume.

Antoine Watteau<sup>1</sup> was born at Valenciennes

<sup>1</sup> Caylus writes Wateau, as do most of his contemporaries, although the artist himself often signed his works Watteau. The reduplication of the "t" was optional at that date.

## ANTOINE WATTEAU

in 1684, and was baptised in that town on October the 10th. He was, says Caylus, the son of a tiler; Gersaint corrects this to "master tiler and carpenter," and some Valenciennes writers, in particular M. Cellier, insist on the fact that Watteau's father was in easy circumstances. The same correction has been made in the case of Greuze's family. Greuze's father was a carpenter at Tournus; like Watteau, Greuze started life in extreme poverty, and a discussion has arisen as to whether this was the result of the family circumstances or of their fathers' opposition to their vocation. However this may be, it would appear that Watteau's origin was exceedingly humble, at any rate from a pecuniary point of view. His father was a hard man; he had no desire to have a painter son. M. de Julienne, who became Watteau's devoted friend and sympathetic patron, declares that his father did not oppose his wishes, and that he even placed him for some time with a painter at Valenciennes, so that he might learn the principles of his art. It is a fact that Watteau was placed with a certain Gérin, painter to the municipality. But Caylus and Gersaint (Watteau's friend and





THE MUSIC LESSON (WALLACE COLLECTION)

*Photograph, Mansell & Co.*

## ANTOINE WATTEAU

picture dealer) explain that this painter was a mere dauber, and moreover that Watteau's father soon refused to pay the expenses of his education and tried to force his son to become a tiler like himself. There are striking analogies between the early years of Watteau and Greuze. Greuze's father began by severely chastising his son when he caught him drawing; some writers say that he finally yielded and allowed him to go to Paris with a painter called Grandon. What is certain is that Greuze, with or without permission, followed Grandon to Paris, and that Watteau too went to Paris with a painter called Métayer, who was employed as a scene decorator. This was in 1702, Watteau was eighteen years old, and Gérin had just died. The young man had already left him, understanding that he could teach him nothing. He was soon abandoned by Métayer, who had no more work to give him and who returned to his own home. Henceforth Watteau was alone in Paris, without money, clothes, or resources of any kind, disowned by his father and already in delicate health.

Watteau, like Greuze later on, now fell into

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the extreme of poverty. But Greuze was fortunately blessed with a robust constitution. The future author of *L'Embarquement pour Cythère* no doubt developed the germs of his consumption during this period of acute suffering. He ended by seeking employment at the Pont Notre-Dame. In this quarter were to be found numbers of shops which traded in wretched paintings, such as small-sized portraits or devotional subjects; these were fabricated by the dozen and sold to country shopkeepers. The employer engaged a few unhappy assistants and insisted on rapidity of execution. "This indeed," we read in "Lorangère's Catalogue," "was the only quality demanded of them. Some did skies, others draperies, others heads, others again put in the whites." We can imagine the sort of stuff produced, by thinking of the pictures to be found nowadays in certain shops that sell religious illuminations—though chromolithographs have for the most part replaced painting by hand. The work entrusted to Watteau was of no more value than the water-colour cards or the touched-up prints by which so many unfortunate beings, who once dreamt of becoming painters, earn a

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laborious living. The young man soon acquired such dexterity that he was entrusted with the sole execution of an entire copy. It was his duty in particular to reproduce a certain St Nicholas that was much in request. He soon knew it by heart and had no need to consult the original. It happened one day that the mistress of the shop forgot to give him the copy, which she was in the habit of locking up every evening. She called Watteau, who was working in the attics, and began to rate him soundly for taking advantage of her oversight in order to idle. He amused himself by letting her scold on, and when she had worked herself into a passion, amazed her by producing the picture, which he had completely finished from memory.

Watteau's remuneration for work such as this was three livres<sup>1</sup> every Saturday, and out of a "kind of charity he was given a daily meal of soup." Starvation of soul and body, a sordid and hopeless life—such were the circumstances of the man who was soon to create a new world of delicate visions. In the

<sup>1</sup> A livre at that time was worth a little more than the present franc.

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meantime he was learning nothing and spoiling his hand. How was he to extricate himself from this situation? And yet the young man, who possessed intense determination in spite of his frail body, did not give way to despair. He drew from nature whenever he could snatch an opportunity, on holidays, during his rare moments of leisure, or at night. At last, by a happy chance, he made the acquaintance of Claude Gillot who, according to M. de Julienne, invited him to live with him after seeing some of his drawings. Gillot was a man of great talent, with extreme skill in the art of ornamental painting, and a curious and fanciful imagination. He was an artist of the Renaissance who had strayed into the last years of the pompous and morose seventeenth century. He painted bacchanals, satyrs, nymphs—a whole sensual mythology—and genre pictures, and historical scenes, all with flexibility and spirit. At the end of his life he confined himself entirely to representing scenes of Italian comedy. He may be considered as one of the most interesting of those artists who lived during that ungrateful period of transition between the seventeenth century and the Regency, when

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art was trying to disencumber itself from an unbearable classicism, and was seeking confusedly to adapt itself to the life of its time—an attempt that is nowadays called modernity. In any case, if there only remained to Gillot the glory of being Watteau's precursor, it would be a sufficient title in the history of French art.

Watteau's meeting with Gillot showed him his true path. Rescued from his lugubrious existence, he at once understood the rich and varied decorative ideas of his new companion, and set himself to work with enthusiasm. He was instinctively attracted by graceful, lively, cheerful painting. The exquisite vision of all the felicities he had never known began to dawn in the soul of this frail youth, prematurely shattered by ill-health and poverty. Poor as he was, he worshipped elegance; timid and retiring, he delighted in amorous luxury; sick, he could yet adore at the shrine of tender and sensuous pleasure; and his sharpened vision took the keenest joy in all the graces of life. The subjects suggested to him by Gillot were those most likely to satisfy Watteau's tendencies. Italian comedy, with



A LADY AT HER TOILET (WALLACE COLLECTION)

*Photograph, Mansell & Co.*



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its whimsical disguises, its lively, well-defined characters, its slim Harlequins, its simple Pierrots, the dainty roguery of its Columbines and its gaudy Pulcinellos, was bound to tempt the painter and furnish him with joyous pretexts for his intense love of life. This is Watteau's first phase. He began to imitate Gillot, and acquired from this excellent craftsman resources of which he had hitherto been ignorant. Their tastes and characters were similar, and they conceived a lively friendship for each other. This identity of disposition, however, eventually led to a quarrel. "They were too much alike," says Gersaint, "and no fault was let pass on either side." They were evidently two loyal-hearted but nervous creatures. What we know of Gillot's physiognomy and works leads us to suppose that he was capricious and irritable. There is no doubt that Watteau was already consumptive at this time, and had the characteristic traits of the illness—a great deal of heart, and a tender and confiding, but changeable disposition, moments of exaltation followed by extreme depression, sudden fits of melancholy, and excessive sensitiveness. Gillot moreover must,





AUTUMN (LOUVRE)

*Photograph, Giraudon*

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no doubt, have been jealous of the growing talent of his pupil. "They parted on bad terms," says Caylus, "and during the rest of his life, all the gratitude Watteau was able to show his master was restricted to a profound silence. He even disliked being questioned as to their connection and the breach between them. But as regards his works, he would praise them and never allow people to ignore what he owed to him. On the other hand, Gillot (either because he was influenced by motives of jealousy, as many people say, or because he ended by judging himself correctly and admitting that his pupil had surpassed him) abandoned painting, and took to drawing and etching." We shall therefore never know the exact causes of the quarrel. Gillot's jealousy and hasty disposition are probably sufficient to account for it. Watteau, none the less, learnt some valuable lessons from Gillot, and in particular the knowledge of his true bent.

On leaving Gillot, Watteau went to Claude Audran's, taking with him Lancret, who had been his comrade at Gillot's, and who later on was to become, like Pater, his pupil and suc-

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cessor. Audran was a painter of ornaments, who had the post of doorkeeper at the Luxembourg. He was a skilful disciple of Raphael's and Primaticcio's theories of ornament painting. He had a certain amount of taste and excelled in ornamenting white or gold backgrounds and in making the borders of ceilings and panels. Under him Watteau acquired once for all the quality of decorative flexibility. His first employment with Métayer at the Opera had given him a feeling for the decorative aspect of things, and also a taste for the theatre. Gillot had encouraged this taste by making him paint scenes from Italian comedy and figures in costume. The work he did while with Audran put the finishing touch to that feeling for ornament, for graceful combination, and for a kind of garland-like composition which permeates the drawing of Watteau's figures and makes one of his greatest charms.

At the same time, during his stay with Audran there came to Watteau two revelations of the highest importance. Living in the Luxembourg, he discovered that he was a landscape painter. The beautiful scenery of the park, which is wilder and more natural than

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that of the other royal parks, filled him with enthusiasm, and he set about drawing from nature with ardour. It was these scenes that suggested to him the great clumps of luxuriant and noble trees which form such mysteriously poetical backgrounds to his figures. Here he learnt to compose, to place his characters in a vibrating atmosphere, and to base all his graceful imaginings on the solid foundation of observation of nature. His other discovery was Rubens. He visited and revisited in the Luxembourg picture gallery the triumphant display of the series of great colour-poems that relate Marie de Médicis' life. At the sight of these masterpieces Watteau felt his Flemish descent, his descent from a race of colourists, thrill and stir within him. Already, in the earlier works painted at Gillot's, the influence of the little Flemish masters can be felt—their manner of applying their touches with precision and a certain amount of hardness, and of putting in details upon a "ground" which has been broadly, richly, and fluently prepared. But it was his contact with Rubens which finally revealed him to himself. He copied him with passion, and imitated him



JUPITER AND ANTIOPE (LOUVRE)

*Photograph, Giraudon*

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with perfect frankness, joyfully reverting to his race. But it would be wrong to conclude from this that Watteau was only influenced by the Flemish, to whom, in spite of his French birth, he belonged. It is evident indeed that he was saturated with Rubens to such an extent that he may be considered as the painter of all others who most contributed to turn aside his contemporaries from Italian taste and the technique of the school of Fontainebleau, and to reinstate over French painting Rubens' vigorous and realistic influence. But at this period of his life Watteau, in his passionate desire for knowledge, imitated the Italians as well. Only he turned, not to the disfigurers and degenerate parodists of this fine school, but to the true masters, such as Titian and Veronese—witness the *Antiope* of the Louvre. These influences, added to that of Rubens, developed his own personality in a direction totally opposed to all the principles of the seventeenth century. Thus, by combining the execution of Rubens with that of Titian, he succeeded in creating that inimitable technique which is known to history as Watteau's technique, and is the very quint-

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essence of French art. By the time he had acquired this, he had also possessed himself of his own personal dream, purified and raised to lyrical heights by the mysterious power of his illness, which, by keeping him morally aloof from his age, was to gain him a special place in universal art and make him the precursor of our most modern moods.

During his stay with Audran, Watteau's individuality, which had been first aroused at Gillot's, blossomed and expanded. In this brief existence everything was hurried—the formation of his genius, the incidents of its development and the results it produced. The essential feature of Watteau's life was this febrile haste of evolution, this kind of perpetual prescience of death. Caylus, who is full of absurdities and whose judgment is mediocre, suddenly makes a profound and striking remark: "We are about to behold," says he, "his talent develop, but in the midst of an existence *agitated by restlessness and by the disgust which he felt for himself and all mankind.*" Here we have a revelation of the power of physiological influences over a great mind. Watteau's whole story lies here in a nutshell.



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He heard death's urgent call, and this is what we divine throughout his whole career, in his perpetual changes and in the inconceivable and frantic haste of his last eleven years, during which time he painted the imposing series of his masterpieces.

Whilst with Audran he developed too vigorously not to feel impatient at the idea of remaining an ornament painter. One day he showed his master a picture painted during his leisure moments and representing troops leaving for the war. This was the beginning of his second manner (the first deals with Italian comedy), a manner steeped in the little Flemish masters; during this period Watteau, by means of a gradually widening realism, arrived at the point of preserving in his small canvases all Rubens' admirable breadth, while achieving a masterly originality of grouping. Audran was too clever not to understand the value of the picture, but he was anxious to keep a pupil whose help was so efficacious, and who was so amazingly gifted as to execute his work quicker and better than his master. He therefore artfully advised him not to enter upon a path in which he might lose his skill as de-





THE JUDGMENT OF PARIS (LOUVRE)

*Photograph, Giraudon*

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corator. Watteau was quick-witted; he felt how little he could depend on disinterested advice from Audran. As he was bent on leaving him in order to devote himself to original work, for which he now felt himself ripe, he looked about for a courteous excuse, not being able to allege a quarrel as in the case of Gillot. He therefore announced his intention of returning to Valenciennes to visit his family. In order to pay for his journey he sold his military picture to Sirois, Gersaint's father-in-law, for sixty livres, and left Paris, in spite of all Audran's attempts to prevent him.

At Valenciennes Watteau painted several other military pictures, of marches, camps, cavalry, and guards. They are admirable for their execution, their truth, and their vivacious grace, and some of them are as fine pictorially speaking as the most celebrated of his Pastorals. They illustrate camp-life with wit and anecdote. It is certain that it was the picturesque and amusing side of this life that particularly struck and delighted Watteau, but it is somewhat exaggerated to state, as the Goncourts do, that Watteau shows himself in these pictures, as in all his others, "a beautifier, a marvellous

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painter of Utopias, the most amiable and the most determined of liars." Watteau is not more fanciful in these subjects than Wouvermans or the other Dutch and Flemish painters of military life, and these camp scenes, in their elegant and dissolute confusion, where "the dainties of town have been carted to the soldier's tent, and the fiddles of Lerida play marches that lead the way to death where smart La Tulipe struts and swaggers, and Manon flirts between two gun-shots, and a host of little love-birds flutter light-heartedly into the midst of war's stern discipline"—all this is indeed an authentic picture of the armies of the period, when men died heroically between two witticisms—this, truly, is "war in lace ruffles." Watteau, moreover, worked from nature.

He soon tired of Valenciennes when he had once satisfactorily proved to his family that his vocation was a genuine one. Without reckoning his humour, and the characteristic restlessness of his disease, which were constantly urging him to change of scene, he found at Valenciennes neither stimulus to production nor opportunities for showing his works. He

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therefore returned to Paris, where he was beginning to be known. The picture he had sold to Sirois, and another one of a halt which he had sent him later, had been seen and appreciated by some connoisseurs. Watteau was seized with the desire of winning the Academy prize and going to Rome. He competed in the year 1709, the subject being *David granting Abigail Nabal's pardon*. The first prize was carried off by Antoine Grison and Watteau only received the second. This did not carry with it the privilege of visiting Rome. He determined, therefore, to continue studying in Paris and to present some further works to the notice of the Academy, in the hopes of obtaining its favour. For this purpose, in 1712, he ventured, without a word, to exhibit the two pictures he had sold to Sirois, in a room through which the Academicians were in the habit of passing. They were struck with astonishment by these two pictures, and admired their "vigorous colouring, and a certain harmony which made them appear the work of an old master." The painter de la Fosse made enquiries as to their author. It was discovered that he was a young and unknown painter, who



THE EMBARKMENT FOR CYTHERA (LOUVRE)

*Photograph, Giraudon*

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begged the members of the Academy to be so kind as to intercede in his favour for a pension from the King, so that he might study in Italy. M. de la Fosse was surprised, and sent for Watteau. Delighted by his extreme modesty and by the charm of his manners, he generously declared that Watteau did not realise the extent of his talent and underrated his ability; that after what he had accomplished alone, there was no need for him to seek instruction in Italy; that the Academicians were of opinion that he knew more than they did, and was capable of doing them honour; so that, if he took the proper steps, he would be accepted as a member of their society. He did so and was immediately received, Coypel being president. In consideration of his circumstances, the Academy was even courteous enough to reduce the usual "pecuniary present" to the sum of one hundred livres.

There is something extraordinary in this adventure, which so unexpectedly altered Watteau's material prospects and, after so many years of extreme poverty, caused him to step in one moment out of embarrassment and obscurity into fame. But everything in

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his life is extraordinary, and here again we must recognise a fateful sign of that swift destiny which suddenly decided to bring his genius to light, only to plunge it nine years later into the obscurity of the grave. To a person acquainted with the habits of the Academy, its turn of mind, its traditions, its routine and its innumerable injustices, there seems something little short of miraculous in this spontaneous admission to its circle of a young man of twenty-eight, with neither friends nor fortune, a young man who had not even won the Prix de Rome, but had come humbly to beg for help in his studies. This incident is unique of its kind, and does honour to the Academy by the simplicity with which it took place on either side ; from one day to the next it enabled Watteau to earn his living comfortably, to become famous, and finally to give us in his Pastorals (since it is by this trivial name that these profound poems are known) the measure of his radiant and melancholy genius.



## II

Watteau's life from 1712 to 1721—His illness—Visits to different friends, Crozat, Vleughels, Sirois, and Gersaint—His journey to London—His last stay at Nogent-sur-Marne and his death—How he was regretted, imitated, and finally deserted in common with his contemporaries—Lastly, how he was rediscovered and more admired for the superficial qualities of his art than for the profoundness of his soul.

WATTEAU from this time forth set to work with renewed energy. He was only definitely admitted to the Academy on August 28th, 1717. All accepted candidates were obliged on their reception to present a work in the style of the one which had led to their election. Watteau was behindhand, not from indolence, but from over-scrupulousness, and had several times to be reminded of the rules. Finally he produced his work—it was that unique masterpiece *L'Embarquement pour Cythère*.

During the same time he was working at that host of drawings in pencil and in red



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chalk, and at those numerous pictures of which *L'Embarquement pour Cythère* seems to be the synthesis, and which form a kind of radiant halo of studies around it. Watteau's life was barren of events: he was growing more and more ill, and his work became his sole passion; he worked feverishly, particularly at his drawing, for he considered himself, above all, a draughtsman, thought little of his colouring, and only believed in his talent when he had a pencil in his hand. He did not marry, and his biographers are silent as to his emotional experiences. Outside his work, the restlessness of his moody and wayward existence continued to accentuate itself. When we consider his character later on, we shall find in it both the effects of his disease and the psychological causes that gave his art such an unutterably pathetic charm. He lived somewhat at haphazard, and showed an incredible contempt for money—not so much the noble disinterestedness of an artist, as that of a creature who no longer belongs to this world. The absence of any information as to his love affairs in the contemporary biographies, written by men who knew him well and are lavish of details as to

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his disposition, shows us that this side of life must have been insignificant in such a moribund existence as Watteau's. His art, indeed, filled his life to such an extent that we wonder how in so short a time he was able to complete so great a number of minutely executed works. There can have been no room for anything else during those nine years.

He consented to go and live with a certain M. Crozat, a wealthy man who was fond of artists and threw open to him a house filled with curious and beautiful things, and particularly with drawings by the old masters, studies by Bassano, Van Dyck, Titian, and Rubens. Watteau was delighted and took much pleasure in copying them. At the same time he was engaged in decorating his host's dining-room with pictures of the *Four Seasons*, which are executed with such spirit and a touch so sure in spite of its rapidity, that they seem inspired by a presentiment of his end. In 1721 he painted the great and famous picture known by the name of *Gersaint's Sign*. He told Gersaint that he wanted to "unstiffen his fingers," and offered to paint him a sign to hang outside the shop which the picture-dealer



GERSAINT'S SIGN (DETAIL) (BERLIN ACADEMY)

*Photograph, Braun, Clément & Cie, Dornach, Paris, and New York*

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had recently opened. "I was somewhat reluctant," says the latter naïvely, in "*Lorangère's Catalogue*," "to satisfy Watteau, for I greatly preferred employing him in more serious undertakings, but seeing that it would please him, I consented." This marvellous work was painted in eight days, or rather in eight mornings, for Watteau's weak health only allowed of his working in the mornings. "This is the only work that a little tickled his vanity, and he made no difficulty about admitting it to me." He left M. Crozat's house, where he was very comfortable, out of a desire for complete independence, and went to live with his friend Vleughels (who afterwards became Principal of the Academy at Rome, where he died); he then retired to a small apartment belonging to M. Sirois, and refused his address to people who asked for it. Henceforth his detachment from the world became complete; he lived alone with his dreams and his illness, seized by that longing for solitude which modern medicine defines as a neurotic phenomenon accompanying phthisis. His contempt for his material interests increased. When Caylus advised him to be a little less

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neglectful of his affairs, he answered, "Isn't the worst that can happen to me the hospital? No one is refused admittance there." It required a devoted friend like M. de Julienne to take charge of his earnings and, with the assistance of Gersaint, to save more than nine thousand livres for him—for Watteau always considered himself over-paid and seemed to be ignorant of the value of money.

After leaving Vleughels in 1718, he wandered about for some time, and as he was at once both shy and confiding, it sometimes happened that he was overreached. Some acquaintances having spoken well of England in his presence, he conceived a morbid desire to visit it, in order to satisfy once more his passion for perpetual change. He went there in 1719, stayed in London, painted there and had some success, but fell so ill that he left. Needless to say what harm this visit no doubt did to a consumptive patient. He returned iller and more exhausted than ever, and expressed a desire to recover his strength in the country; this was after a six months' stay with Gersaint, during which time he painted his admirable *Sign.*

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The Abbé Haranger persuaded M. le Fèvre, the intendant of Les Menus, to lend him his house at Nogent. The celebrated Rosalba Carriera, whom he much admired, did him a last pleasure by painting his portrait. At Nogent, Watteau's health declined more and more rapidly and he gave himself up entirely to religion. His last work was a *Crucifixion* for the curé of Nogent. It was to this curé that Watteau addressed the celebrated saying which has often been quoted and fathered upon others. When the worthy priest in his final exhortations showed him a clumsily carved crucifix, "Ah," exclaimed the artist, "take away that crucifix. It pains me. How could anyone treat my Master so shockingly?" The last moments of his life were employed in an act of kindness and in generously repairing an injustice. Some time before, Watteau, in a fit of ill-temper, had dismissed his compatriot and pupil Pater. He now reproached himself with this unkindness and even accused himself to Gersaint of having been "afraid of Pater's rival talent." This was evidently not the case; perhaps he was moved by a vague scruple, inspired by the recollection of similar feelings



GILLES AND HIS FAMILY (WALLACE COLLECTION)

*Photograph, Mansell & Co.*



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which Gillot had once shown towards himself and from which he had suffered—perhaps by humility and magnanimity. Gersaint, at Watteau's request, sent for Pater, and the dying man spent a whole month giving him advice as to his art, in order to atone for his former anger. In a last access of vitality Watteau imagined that his native air would save him. It is well known that consumptives cling to the illusion of the benefit to be derived from change of air. He begged Gersaint to make preparations for the journey to Valenciennes and to sell his effects for this purpose. The sale produced 3000 livres, to which were added the 6000 saved by M. de Julienne at the time of his visit to England. This sum was merely destined to return to the sick man's family. Watteau waited vainly for the moment in which he should have regained sufficient strength to bear the move. He died almost suddenly in Gersaint's arms on July 18th, 1721. He had not completed his thirty-seventh year.

The devotion of a few friends, Crozat, Sirois, Vleughels, M. de Julienne, Gersaint, and Caylus supported during his short existence one of the most unfortunate geniuses known to the



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history of art. M. de Julienne, who idolised his painting, raised him the most durable of monuments by writing his "Abrégé de la Vie de Watteau" and by taking the initiative in saving for posterity 350 of his drawings and studies. These he had admirably engraved under the title of "Figures de différents caractères" and published in two volumes, in an edition of 100 large paper copies. The "Mercure," which, as a rule, paid little attention to artists and their deaths, announced Watteau's in terms of admiration and regret. The artist's shy and retiring disposition did not prevent his being sincerely lamented by those who became sufficiently intimate with him to learn to distinguish between the confiding goodness of his heart and the brusqueness due to his illness. But it does not appear that his death made any real impression on his contemporaries. Watteau departed with far less pomp than the least of those "painters to the King," whose mere names are all we know to-day. True, he died member of the Royal Academy, and was much appreciated by influential amateurs; but success came to him only nine years before his death, and his

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astonishing indifference to worldly matters, money, and honours, his frequent absences, his ill-health, all these causes contributed to limit this success to the esteem of a chosen few. The prices fetched by his works remained insignificant; we have seen how in his own opinion they were always too high, for with incredible modesty he did not consider himself a remarkable painter, but merely a good draughtsman. More than twenty years after his death, at Lorangère's sale, for whose catalogue Gersaint took the opportunity of writing notes about his friend, the highest price reached was 361 livres for a very important *Concert*. The prices did not go up until 1767, at the sale of M. de Julienne, who had bought most of Watteau's principal pictures; the *Fêtes Vénitiennes* fetched 2615 livres, the celebrated *Mezzetin* 700 livres; and at the Blondel de Gagny sale in 1776, the *Champs Elysées* went up to 6515 livres. Nowadays even these prices seem ridiculously small.

Watteau's life, therefore, consisted of twenty-three years of extreme poverty, four years of comparative obscurity, and nine years of unostentatious celebrity. His influence, however,



MEZZETIN (HERMITAGE GALLERY)

*Photograph, Giraudon*

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was destined to be immense throughout his century, and it began immediately after his death. He brought about a revolution in style, in technique, and in the choice of subjects—in one word, he created the eighteenth century. Truth to tell, this requires some qualification ; later on we shall attempt to show that his work was twofold, that it had two phases and two meanings. The individual meaning and innermost spirit, which were the outcome of the peculiar conditions of his illness, were not perceived by his generation, and yet it is because of them that Watteau appears to us truly great, personal, inimitable, and passionately interesting. This individual meaning, this innermost spirit, had nothing in common with the eighteenth century ideal ; an ideal entirely inspired by the superficial qualities, the appearance and the scenery of his compositions, which were considered exquisite, but were not suspected of possessing any depth. Watteau, coming as he did at the end of a century, did not make his appearance merely at a conventional date, which we arbitrarily insert in the uniform course of time ; he arrived at a really psychological moment,

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when the ideal of the century was dying—the dull, allegorical, stilted century—at a moment when everyone had been surfeited with severity and pompousness, and was longing for a more intimate art and a life of simpler elegance. During this transition from the decadence of Louis XIV. to the Regency and the reign of Louis XV.—a real moral and social transition—Watteau's art supplied the necessary formula, and no one was more imitated—or less understood. His scenes from Italian comedy and his Pastorals, 'works which are unique for the mysterious sadness of their smile, seemed to be merely smiling; a whole school of superficial charmers derived from them. His work was perfectly understood *in the letter* and absolutely misconceived *in the spirit*. For this reason, we may say that the whole eighteenth century was made by Watteau, and yet that he remained its most isolated phenomenon. There are three figures in this strange century which dominate it, while at the same time they contradict it—Watteau, Chardin, and La Tour. Chardin's contribution was an "intimist" realism and a knowledge of the psychology of the poor; La

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Tour's, a profound analysis of the human soul; and Watteau's, boundless dreams and a shuddering desire for the absolute. Not one of these three men whose genius illuminates their age was really penetrated by it.

Watteau in his short life had time to prove in magnificent style the possibility of diverting French art from the effete influence of Italianism towards more naturally ethnological sources, towards the traditions of the North, towards Rubens and Ruysdael. He was the first, by reason of his Flemish descent, to show the possibility of this path, which was followed after him by Boucher, and under the guidance of Fragonard, Louthembourg and others, led the century to the threshold of the Revolution. This was his technical contribution. At the same time he created the pictorial formula of sentimental poetry adapted to his age. In the domain of literature this poetry remained extremely mediocre, but Watteau straightway raised it to sublime heights. It was his lot to be admired, and yet be translated by trifling madrigals and namby-pamby eclogues, which pretended, forsooth, to equal the loftiness and sumptuous "morbidezza" of his works.

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Strange fate, and one which must always attract critics ! After influencing his successors' art to the point of becoming (most unintentionally) responsible for the worst "sickly-ing o'er" of his style, Watteau was destined to disappear in the reaction of David's pupils and Ingres' school, and of the neo-Roman classicism of the Consulate and Empire. *L'Embarquement pour Cythère* was relegated for many long years to a room in the Academy, where it was bombarded with bread pellets by David's pupils ; while at the same time La Tour's portrait of Rousseau was sold for *three francs*, two of Chardin's portraits fetched *forty francs* (at the Lemoyne sale), and a bitter conspiracy of hatred crushed out the very recollection of the charm, mastery, and freedom of this generation of painters.

The reaction of the second Romanticism was needed to avenge the eighteenth century, and the bold and learned initiative of the Goncourt brothers was required to do it that justice which, strange to say, it had never ceased to find in England, at a moment when French taste, under the empire of pseudo-classical prejudices, fondly attempted to deny



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its most delightful representatives. Watteau then showed himself in all the youthful freshness and ingenuous charm of his soul ; the powerful originality of his masterly technique and his importance as head of a school and as a great artistic personality, rich enough to determine French production during eighty years, became manifest. But at the very moment of the re-appearance of the consumptive genius in the history of art, when Baudelaire, in a celebrated poem, was placing him among the "beacons" of humanity, a confusion arose between Watteau and his pupils, notwithstanding the distinction which the Goncourts pointed out with much critical acumen. The grace and supple elegance and tenderness of Watteau's works deceived his admirers of the year 1860 as they had deceived those of 1720, and hid from them his inmost soul. He was considered much as a Lancret or a Pater, though more talented than either ; people mentioned him in the same breath as Boucher, without perceiving the immense difference between the two men. In comparing him with Fragonard they erred less, for Fragonard is the only painter of the eighteenth century





THE LOVE LESSON (BERLIN ACADEMY)

*Photograph, Braun, Clément & Cie, Dornach, Paris, and New York*

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in whom Watteau's soul was re-incarnated for a fleeting moment, when he was painting for Madame du Barry the celebrated series known as the Grasse decorations. But people failed to understand that Watteau was not only *more talented* than all these men, but also completely *different* from them, and that he contributed to art an element that was altogether exceptional and unexpected, namely, intellectual distinction, the representation of melancholy and love as they are conceived in the metaphysical poetry of our own time under the name of "maladie de l'infini."

It is this difference between Watteau and his age which we shall seek to determine here, so as to react against a judgment which eulogises him without discrimination, following hard upon one which depreciated him iniquitously. Nowadays Watteau has been rescued from silence, from detestation, and from oblivion; his technique is admired; his part in the evolution of French art defined; his works are shining lights in all the great galleries of the world. Now, therefore, that the essential is secured, it is time to go back to the details, and we may be allowed to

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destroy the legend of the Watteau of courtly shepherds, the painter of graces and laughter, the "petit-maitre" whose wonderful skill illustrated sentimental trifles, eclogues, and idylls. All this is ornament and appearance; there is more than this in Watteau; there is a thought in him, a poignant sadness, which puts him on a level with the greatest of lyrical poets; dignity masks his despair with discretion; the presentiment of death lingers amidst his twilights of rose and blue; a touch of the eternal mystery is on him; here we have the embodiment of Dreams in an age which was witty, subtle, and sensual, but which would have failed to understand the word. In short, here we have a genius with a strain of consumption which shows itself only to render visible that sensation of the absolute with which it inspires all its victims. All Watteau's characters seem to ask each other with weary grace and languid renunciation that terrible question of despairing love which the greatest of modern artists puts in the mouth of Isolde: "Tristan, must we live?"

This is what we shall attempt to show in our analysis of Watteau's soul, while at the

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same time paying due recognition to his technique, which created the eighteenth century, influenced Delacroix, and made possible certain of the discoveries of Impressionist art in the last forty years of the nineteenth century.

### III

Scenes from Italian comedy and pictures of military life.

ITALIAN comedy with its characters and costumes served Watteau only as a pretext for his own imagination. Perhaps he acquired this taste for theatrical scenes during the short time he spent working with Métayer at the opera. Perhaps his stay with Gillot confirmed the disposition. We may safely assume so. But we must say at once that the artist's rendering of actual sights was an interpretation and in no wise a translation. Italian comedy was pretty, dainty, droll, but it never had that aspect of high poetry with which the tender magic of Watteau clothed it.

From this period we find in Watteau's art that faculty for transfiguration which is the sign of genius and is totally different from what the Goncourts call "lying." Watteau lays hold of reality and transmutes it into

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something fine and rare, which yet remains true and harmonious. He constructs a whole world of fantasy, and it is a world that might exist. It is the world Watteau saw with the eye of that extraordinary mind which fate had placed in the sickly body doomed to an untimely end.

When the seventeenth century was at its sullenest, the artist appeared with his young dream. The cruel reverses of 1709, war and famine, the decrepitude of the aged and embittered monarch, and the underhand and bigoted rule of Mme. de Maintenon, cast a dark cloud of "ennui," of sour and spiteful sadness, over a ceremonious court weary of its own pomp. It seemed as though there remained in art not a single spontaneous or lively sentiment. The pseudo-heroism of historical painting lay like an oppression on men's souls. They languished for a smiling art which should be free from bombast and pretentious symbolism, but they dared say nothing through terror of the king. Italian comedy then appeared as the sole distraction. It was not "noble," but it was amusing, and on that account infinitely precious to the court and to amateurs of art.



PLEASURES OF THE THEATRE (BERLIN MUSEUM)

*Photograph, Giraudon*

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Watteau was not born a historical painter, which is as much as to say that at that period he could never hope to pass for a great painter ; he was therefore merely a master of the second rank, and comedy seemed to afford an opening for his talent.

The theme, moreover, was charming, and Watteau returned to it again and again. If his military pictures occupied only a short period of his life, from his stay with Audran to his return from Valenciennes, his Italian scenes were continued contemporaneously with his Pastorals until the end, and served as a transition to the pictures which are entirely imaginary and in which he went beyond the Italian disguises and invented a costume, known only to himself and resembling neither the fashions of Italy nor those of the French regency.

“Laughter as of dancers in the Bergamasque,” write the Goncourts in a brilliant passage, “such is the laughter, such the high spirits, the action and the movement of Watteau’s poems. Here she comes, madcap Folly, with her tinkling bells ! And as she runs, there waken at her steps sounds of gaiety, breaths of Zephyr, noise and laughter.



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Ruffs and caps, buff jerkins and daggers, tunics and capes, come and go. Here rush past a troop of jesters, bringing with them through the shadows the rainbow hues of their dress and the carnival of human passions. Strange motley-coloured family, clothed in sunshine and silken-striped! Here is one whose mask is the night! Look! another paints his cheeks with the moon! Harlequin, as graceful as a pen-stroke of Parmigiano's! Pierrot, his arms straight to his sides like the letter 'i'! Tartaglios and Scapins, and Cassandras and Doctors, and the favourite Mezzetin, big and brown and smiling, always to the fore, his cap on the back of his head, zebra-coated from top to toe, as proud as a lord and as fat as Silenus. The Spirit of Italian Comedy, nose in air and feet firmly planted, thrums the guitar in every scene; 'tis the duet of Gilles and Columbine that makes the music and the song of Watteau's piece. How charming this marriage of the quaint and sparkling mode of Italy with the mode of the youthful eighteenth century! And there springs—more adorable still—from this union and these nuptials the mode of Watteau! Free and adventurous, vagrant and

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happy, how it delights in all that is new, and 'piquant,' and provocative! Oh! artist-cutter! from your playful scissors there has come to us both the 'sweet neglect,' and the bravery of attire, the morning's easy carelessness, the afternoon's fine raiment. Oh! fairy scissors! you dower the times to come with patterns from the Arabian Nights; Mme. de Pompadour owes you the *négligé* that bears her name. How voluptuously you slipped and cut amidst the silvery satin! Saucily tucked-up skirts, ravishing 'liquefaction of clothes,' roguish prisons of tight-laced bodices, silken baskets for rosy-blooming flesh! Oh! be-ribboned scissors of Watteau, what a dainty realm of coquetry you cut out of the Maintenon's realm of prudery!"

To introduce such figures into painting was real audacity. Gillot had done it unpretentiously in vignettes and small illustrations. We must realise the style of the period in order to understand how great Watteau's audacity was. Le Brun's school had encumbered art with helmeted heroes and pseudo-antique muses, with a jumble of symbolical attributes, torches, and scales, and

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bows, and blades, and horns of abundance. Every picture was a combination of riddles and picture puzzles, inconceivably precious in style. Historical painting, which also included mythological scenes, was the only domain of what was called "grand art." The rest had not the honour of counting, and "genre" pictures were considered an inferior grade of work. The taste of Il Primaticcio, of Rosso, and of the Italians of the decadence finally found in Bernini the expression of its worst defects. By an effort of independence which makes a memorable date in the history of French art, the Versailles sculptors had begun to protest against this intrusion of a degenerate Italianism, by forcing Bernini (who had been sent for by Louis XIV.) to return to Rome. This group of admirable artists, Regnaudin, Tubi, Le Gros, Le Hongre, Van Clève, Raon, Honzeau, and Ballon had carried out Le Brun's plans in the Water Parterre and in the park. But they had managed to give their statues so much life and expression and so much French grace that, notwithstanding the pompousness and allegorical hotch-potch of the designs they were commissioned to execute, the general

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effect of their marble and bronze decorations bore witness to a triumphant revival of native originality. This example, however, had not yet been followed by the painters—Lemoyne had not yet painted the *Plafond d'Hercule* which was to prove a revolution in the pictorial decoration of Versailles, and Vanloo had not yet made his appearance.

It was by the intervention of Watteau's subjects, in spite of their seeming unimportance and modesty, that an entirely fresh art was created.

Doubtless they were "low," these subjects in which a young man ventured to represent Gilles' blouse, and Mezzetin's striped over-all, and the Doctor's black cap, and Columbine's frills, and Harlequin's parti-coloured tights; truly an exquisite mingling of colours, but one that was not permitted by Academic art, which was governed by a set of moral and psychological maxims, and insisted above all that every picture should be didactic and a proper subject for analysis and edifying comments, rather than a pleasure to the eyes. It needed all Watteau's gift of poetical transfiguration to get these works accepted at all; they merely represented



THE MANDOLIN-PLAYER (CHANTILLY)

*Photograph, Braun, Clément & Cie, Dornach, Paris, and New York*

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strolling players, actors of farce, second-rate mummers who were the delight of the groundlings, but were looked down upon by the regular servants of the king. So audacious, indeed, was the innovation that, in all probability, Watteau would not have ventured upon it had he reflected. He painted these things because he loved them, at a time when he was nothing but an obscure collaborator of Gillot and Audran, and totally unknown. Forty years later Greuze undertook the task of making characterised studies of the poorer classes, with the deliberate intention of setting them up as the heroes of a style of painting which should exalt middle-class virtue in opposition to the erotic art of Boucher and Baudoin. But Watteau's case was very different. He had no desire to create a school or to protest against academic art in the name of a new conception. He cared for little else but to express his inward dreams with the freedom of a lonely and disinterested artist. It was his contemporaries who sought him out, fastened upon his art and hailed in it the formula of the future. For spontaneous as it was, it answered to a host of ambient desires. And this is the sole reason

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that the work of this unknown consumptive, poor, shy, and friendless, did not disappear, as logic would seem to have demanded.

These scenes of Italian comedy have supreme beauty. They possess all the qualities of great masterpieces in small dimensions — noble simplicity of landscape, truth of expression, life and flexibility of drawing, originality of grouping, a profound knowledge of the relationship between the figures and the scenery, exquisite colouring and masterly characterisation of types; the combination of all these qualities reveals a painter who possesses the most subtle secrets of his craft and an imagination of surprising sensibility. Veronese's influence is visible in the distribution of the masses and in the diffused light of the atmosphere; Titian's in the golden richness of the flesh tones and in the plane architecture; Ruysdael's is apparent in the management of the stately clouds and tufted trees. These open-air scenes are based on an intense feeling for nature, and are realistic to a degree undreamt of by the official school. Nothing can be further removed from the wretched artificiality of the historical painters, who placed their



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heroes in conventional and frightful landscapes. Watteau was as greatly preoccupied with the accuracy of his effects as Ruysdael, and when we study his technique in more detail we shall see that this preoccupation led him to a discovery of capital importance—namely, that of the decomposition of tones—a discovery by which he became the inventor of impressionism and the link that connects Ruysdael and Claude Lorrain with Turner, Monticelli and Claude Monet.

At times Titian's influence can be seen in his preference for gold and amber tones. Watteau especially enjoyed painting the fading splendours of twilight and steeping the outlines of his lofty thickets and his blue horizons in a warm and liquid gold, and this at a time when painters made an exaggerated use of frigid tones and were actually imitating tapestry and tempera. Watteau was an enthusiastic admirer of Titian's ardent and sensuous palette and is particularly inspired by it in his nudes. The *Jupiter and Antiope* of the Louvre gives us an epitome of this Venetian influence. The lakes, the thickness of colour in the high lights, the richly flowing blonde paint of the flesh, the



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dark and tawny shadows—none of these things are in any way characteristic of the French art of the latter end of the seventeenth century, nor of the pallid languor of Albano. They show rather a faithful imitation of Titian, but an imitation of startling genius, done with a power that re-creates and is the herald of a personal technique. From Veronese, Watteau took with astonishing dexterity some of his effects of subdued light. When he wishes, indeed, this painter of glowing skies, and rich browns, and stormy gleams, and sombre greens, becomes a skilful manipulator of light yellows and greys. He even notes in some of Veronese's skies the typical trait of those horizontal clouds that are characteristic of the atmosphere of Venice, while in Ruysdael's Dutch skies the clouds rise from the ground and spread in a vertical direction towards the zenith. The Dresden Watteaus show still more clearly his affinity to Veronese and his comprehension of cold tones, and the Goncourts are right when they observe that these light and somewhat acid colour schemes have been wrongly attributed to Pater without having been noticed in these works of Watteau's. "He did not even,"

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say they, "leave his pupil the proprietorship of two or three tones of colour." They might have gone further and added that Watteau left no one the proprietorship of any single discovery that has been made in painting since his day. He felt and discovered everything himself, and when, at the latter end of the century, Fragonard again painted pictures with cold lights, he did no more than approach a style in which Watteau had already created masterpieces.

In his scenes from Italian comedy there is yet another protest of a different order. It was at the moment that the Jesuits and Mme. de Maintenon were bringing about the expulsion of the Italian comedians whose licentious farces offended the prudery of the court, that Watteau set about painting them. We behold them in his pictures, wandering or resting in the fields, supping or dancing, improvising torch-light serenades, or diverting themselves by playing at parades. Their whole story is set forth. But there lies another meaning beyond the anecdotic history of these irresponsible charmers whose "*laissez-aller*" amused Watteau in his illness. The artist was already thinking



VENUS AND LOVE (CHANTILLY)

*Photograph, Braun, Clément & Cie, Dornach, Paris, and New York*

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of transforming these beings into the inhabitants of that chimerical world of which he was beginning to have glimpses, the world which he was to create later on in his Pastorals, and which is so singularly akin to Shakespeare's dream world of Venetian fantasy. In Watteau's greatest poems the motley and amusing shapes of his comedians and coquettes reappear. It was their costumes that supplied the elements for the apparelling of his heroes of love and melancholy. It was through them that he effected his transition from the real to the ideal world, and to show his gratitude he immortalised them. It was thanks to them that he insensibly abandoned the realism of little "genre" pictures and succeeded in inventing that pure, strange, metaphysical land whose lyrical immateriality equals and perhaps surpasses Edgar Poe's most abstract dreams, such as "The Island of the Fay."

Watteau's military pictures show another side of his talent. They were immediately understood and appreciated. The artist owed to two of them his reception by the Academy. Caylus gives them the highest praise. They are very few in number and only thirteen of

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them are known to have been engraved by Cochin, Moyreau, Crépy, Ravenet, Scotin, Thomassin, Baron, and Dupin. They are entirely Flemish as regards their technique, and sometimes, in their modest dimensions, are as broadly painted as the canvases of Rubens. M. Eugène Carrière, in particular, has one in his possession of the most attractive workmanship. In these works, Watteau is the direct successor of the little Dutch military painters and of the Flemish "intimists." He does not paint actual war like Wouvermans, or later on, Louthembourg and Casanove. He restricts himself to representing camp-life, halts, and improvised suppers, "vivandières" and unsaddled horses, guards drinking and gambling, in a word, all the disorder of that gallant and licentious army which he saw encamped outside Valenciennes. It is realism, but realism tempered by constant fancy and grace. "Here we find," to quote the Goncourts once more, "braids and decorations, war dressed up in its Sunday best and noisily passing to the sound of stirrup-cups and with hope on the crupper; regrets drowned in wine, the clink of glasses and the shaking of hands; beplumed mules,

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chance-born children clinging to their mothers' breasts; packs of cards, out-of-door kitchens, little scullions clad in white, officers' trunks gaping for their masters' toilette, fresh young beauties stepping down from their waggons with their dainty lace head-dresses all unruffled." And here again we trace that strange gift for transfiguration which gradually developed in Watteau's soul whilst he was scrupulously studying and preparing his future technique—that technique which was a combination of Titian and Rubens and Ruysdael, and ornamental art, and jottings at the theatre and in the street, and which ended by becoming at once individual and inimitable. Here too we can trace that mysterious growth of refined elegance which nothing can explain, unless it be the sad and lovely gift of pain and suffering. He was the son of poor folk, of artisans, a young man condemned to a life of poverty, of lowly occupations and menial employment. Evidently neither his circumstances nor his birth could have made him capable of acquiring that elegance which is only given by the usage of society, by birth and bringing up amidst beautiful and luxurious surroundings,

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amidst works of art and wealthy women. All this must have been in-born in Watteau; he must have divined and invented it by a stroke of genius and by native predisposition; and all the time in his attic of the Pont Notre-Dame as he was sadly turning out his pictures of St Nicholas, he was also forging slowly in his fevered brain a dream of art, the tenderest, the most dazzling, the most deliciously aristocratic that painting perhaps has ever known.

## IV

Watteau's Pastorals or *Fêtes Galantes*—Their character of aloofness from time and place—His technique ; how it is the forerunner of modern impressionism by its division of tones.

THUS Watteau's first two phases as the painter of Italian comedy and then of camp scenes, are not the transformations of an artist seeking his true bent, but the necessary and deliberate technical preparation for his third phase, as painter of the Pastorals. It is thanks to the earlier works that he was able to hit upon the qualities that go to make up his most important compositions and to arrive at the arrangement of his landscapes ; it was these early works that laid the solid basis of realism on which his dream, strengthened by long and serious observation of nature, was subsequently able to rear itself without losing stability ; finally, it was through them that he was able to try his strength, allocate the diverse influences of





FÊTE GALANTE (BERLIN MUSEUM)

*Photograph, Braun, Clément & Cie, Dornach, Paris, and New York*

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Italy and Flanders and discover the secret of his own originality. Few artists' careers have been so logically ordered. Watteau's life was very short, but his ardour, the rapidity of his comprehension, his passion for work, his gift of divination, and above all the chastity of his solitary and uneventful existence, compensated for the briefness of the time allowed him by death.

His "*Pastorales Galantes*," which, truth to tell, are neither pastoral nor gallant, as we understand the words, constitute the most important part of Watteau's work. They are a vast series of poems (more than eighty of them have been engraved), whose titles rarely correspond to any precise anecdote. In any case the anecdote is of no importance. We must regard them only as representing certain persons gathered together in certain places. This certainly does not mean that Watteau was incapable of illustrating the actions denoted by his titles, nor that, like Monticelli later on, he reduced his figures to mere harmonious patches of colour arbitrarily grouped. On the contrary, Watteau tells his tales with the requisite clearness, wit, malice,



THE FALSE STEP (LOUVRE)

*Photograph, Giraudon*

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and vivacity. But the art, the splendour of the colouring, the perfection of the form, and the lyrical atmosphere are so infinitely superior to the subjects represented, that we can think of these no longer. Watteau's "Fêtes Galantes" have no connection with those of Boucher, or of the other eighteenth century masters who imitated the model set by Watteau. They show indeed the same assemblages of coquettes and beaux, the same beribboned and bedecked villagers, the same curtsies and bows, the same tender or daring gestures, and the same prettiness of country scenes. But in the latter painters the anecdote remains the essential motive of the picture, every portion of which is designed to accentuate it. In Watteau we never give it a thought, so entirely does his marvellous execution, and above all his pure and intangible spirit, subdue our minds with an ever intenser thrill and power. If Watteau in his *Faux Pas* seems inclined to provoke a smile at a young woman who has stumbled in the grass and is being helped up by her lover in a somewhat suggestive manner, we feel in a moment that the episode is uninteresting. We are filled with wonder at the

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white nape of the neck, at the twist of the hair, at the delicate tones of the dress, and the unspeakable grace of its folds, at the lover's hand, which is a prodigy of painting, and at the sombre beauty of the background. These are the things that matter. In Watteau at every turn the smallness of the subject is swallowed up by the greatness of the painting; the sight of skill as accomplished as that of the most celebrated masters holds us charmed and bound.

An extraordinary influence emanates from these works. We straightway enter an unknown world, and while we are seized upon by the magnetic forces of beauty and harmony, we wonder to find in their depths that supreme sadness which is the sadness of serenity. An infinitely gentle reaction sets in and our joy by subtle degrees becomes tinged with melancholy.

The first sensation produced by these works is that they are outside of time. Their charm is almost abstract. The personages are alive, but they are neither French nor Italian. Their exquisite attire disconcerts us; we have never seen it but there, and the elements that

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go to make it are diverse. The short cloaks, and silk waistcoats, and tight satin breeches, with their thousand little folds, the stockings and high-heeled shoes, the striped caps, the long narrow bodices, and flowered and brocaded paniers—all these we have seen in actual fashions, but the manner in which they are combined is special and unprecedented. And what a quaint and charming combination it makes! It is not masquerading, for these people look as if they were really clothed according to the habits and customs of the strange land they inhabit. Nor do they look as though they were dressed up for the stage, for there is no sign of display or of showy accessories, nothing but elegant simplicity, discreet and luxurious carelessness. Neither is it a costume peculiar to any particular race. We get the impression that there exists not a nation on the earth capable of dressing thus, and that such attire could only be worn by the happy and chosen few in a land of faëry. At the same time the landscape is no less probable and no less unexpected. Every detail of it is natural and carefully observed. Watteau is a great and

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sincere landscape painter, as decorative as Claude Lorrain and truer—as true as Ruysdael. And yet there is an indefinable something in the arrangement of these natural scenes which makes them seem supernatural. They are not like the severe and majestic gardens of Versailles. Nature is left to herself; the trees are untrimmed; the copses are luxuriant and almost wild. We see statues clothed with ivy, termini, balustrades, ponds, fountains, springs. We know not who put them there; we cannot name the countries that stretch beyond those blue horizons. We know not where we are, in what period, in what place—and we care as little. We are freed from the preoccupation of reality, and yet nothing factitious offends our reason. A whole world, logically constituted, capable of existing in any temperate climate, and yet existing nowhere, opens out to us in Watteau's pictures. We seek to give it a name, Thelema . . . Tempe? No, it is neither of these—nor yet Prospero's Isle, nor the Forest of Arden. Not one of those regions in which the eternal lassitude of man has sought to situate the dear phantom of Repose could be confounded with this.



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Watteau's profound feeling for nature is another of those traits which separate him from his age. Neither the seventeenth nor the eighteenth century understood nature. The former regarded it somewhat as a useful piece of tapestry, as a setting for heroes of tragedy or mythology. The latter pretended to worship it, but in reality used it merely as a pretext for depicting scenes of gallantry. The elegiac and rustic poetry of those times is worse than mediocre—as declamatory as grand opera, as trifling as comic opera. At times the bombast of the drama demands a hurly-burly of storms and thunder-claps, furious surges and savage rocks; at others again we must have a card-board village, with pert milk-maids, simple-minded Lubins, and lambs bedecked with ribbons—sham and pleasing country scenery where rakes from court and town may feign innocence and drink skimmed milk. And even when, about the year 1776, the forerunners of the Revolution appear, and Rousseau preaches the return to nature, and Greuze illustrates Diderot's theories, people still continue to understand nothing of the inherent poetry of nature.





PASTORAL (CHANTILLY)

*Photograph, Braun, Clément & Cie, Dornach, Paris, and New York*

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This poetry is what Watteau discovered in 1705, but his successors failed to comprehend it; there is no trace of it in Boucher, and at the end of the century Hubert Robert and Fragonard have no more than momentary glimmers of it, as it is understood by us. The conception of a landscape ordered and modified for decorative purposes, had been too firmly fixed in people's minds by Italian dogmatism. Ruysdael and Hobbema had seen nature's essential beauty, but their art had had little influence. Claude Lorrain had combined observation with decorative fancy, and little of his genius was remembered save the latter characteristic. Poussin's masterpieces were in the same spirit. With the exception of these men, no one had considered landscape save as a mere corollary of figure-painting, and even later, in Vernet's sea-pieces, which are so accurately observed, the portions that Diderot particularly praises are the little figures, their actions, and their sentimental relationship to the drama of the elements. Watteau, on the contrary, is an intense and truthful lover of nature. He introduces the great poem of the landscape into his "genre" pictures, and

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mingles it inextricably with the poetry of his figures and their attitudes. He is the equal of the most illustrious, and among all the Romantic and Impressionist masters of the nineteenth century, not one can clothe with greater majesty a group of tall trees, reveal more gloriously the misty gleam of twilight, make an horizon seem more magically distant, or orchestrate with greater power the symphony of the sun's dying rays on ground and woodland and water. In Turner there are nearly as many memories of Watteau as of Claude Lorrain, and neither Gainsborough, nor Rousseau, nor Corot ever surpassed the sweetness and strength of the sublime landscapes in *L'Embarquement pour Cythère* and the little *Assemblée dans un Parc*, or of the wonderful background in *Le Repos à la Campagne* which belongs to the imperial collection of Potsdam; an unique series, which was to be seen at the Paris Exhibition of 1900, and which shows Watteau in all his glory.

In an age which imposed the three unities of time, place, and action as an absolute rule in tragedy (at that time considered the highest form of art), it was singularly bold to introduce

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into "genre" painting a sincere feeling for nature, and to create works independent of time and place, and with no action to speak of, or merely an anecdotic one. In all these respects Watteau joined issue with the dying century, and the rising generation was grateful to him. But a misunderstanding, so to speak, then arose between him and his imitators. The words "gallantry" and "pastoral" cannot indeed be applied to them and to him in the same manner. "He was," says Caylus, "*un peu berger*." The expression is highly typical. One must be well acquainted with the spirit of the eighteenth century to appreciate the full meaning of such a phrase. It is as untranslatable as the German "*Gemuth*," used to express that state of vague sentimentalism and unexpressed poetry which is characteristic of the misunderstood soul. For us moderns, when we apply the words "pastoral" and "berger" to Watteau, we can only do so in their highest and deepest sense. The whole of his work is *an association of conventionalised nature with the sadness or the desires of man, regarded independently of time*. The eighteenth century pastoral does not in any way render this idea,



THE MUSIC PARTY (BERLIN ACADEMY)

*Photograph, Braun, Clément & Cie, Dornach, Paris, and New York*

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as is proved by the minor literature of eclogues which has come down to us. The pastoral celebrates the shepherd's life and the simple pleasures of the country. Watteau never concerns himself with this. There are no accessories and rustic scenes in his pictures. His elegant and visionary creatures do nothing. In the midst of noble and mysterious scenery, they move, and sit, and lie, scarce tasting of the delicate viands set beside them; and sometimes they gently talk to the accompaniment of gentle caresses, and sometimes in silence let the vast soul of twilight sink into their beings. The real name of these pictures should be *Promenades Sentimentales* or *Contemplations*. We have here an element which had never before appeared in art—conscious meditation, the spirit's silence in the contemplation of nature. Alone in the seventeenth century, La Fontaine caught a glimpse of it and hinted at it in a few admirable lines, such as :—

. . . “O belles ! fuyez  
*Le fond des bois et leur vaste silence.*”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>. . . “Oh ! fair ones, fly  
The depths of woods and their vast silences.”

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This passing note was developed by Watteau; he is the creator of a whole unlooked for range of feelings, so unlooked for, indeed, that after him no one divined their inward meaning, and he remains alone, in the beginning of the eighteenth century, the precursor by more than a hundred years of our actual preoccupations. Amiel's celebrated formula, "Every landscape is a condition of soul," might serve as a motto for Watteau's work. When the eighteenth century was exhumed (the word is not too strong) by the initiative of the Goncourts and of a chosen band of faithful admirers of native French genius, among all the masters who came to light, not one seemed as completely our contemporary, as direct an interpreter of our ways of feeling, as Watteau. In truth, a master and a precursor stood revealed, one who, detached from his own age, had reached the lofty plane of general ideas.

Though the Goncourts had an intuition of this entirely modern quality in Watteau's sadness, they did not clearly express it. These artist-critics, though possessing the keenest intelligence, had little sentiment, and were taken up rather with the delicacy of his plastic



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qualities than with the *inward meaning* of the master's works. But they are marvellously skilful in finding words and images to express the splendid yet unostentatious luxury that characterises him. In a final phrase, on which unfortunately too little stress is laid, they suggest this *inward meaning*, which they perceived vaguely, and yet sufficiently to make them distinguish Watteau from the rest of his contemporaries. I must quote these remarkably fine pages, for no art-critic has approached them in their truth, their power of characterisation, and their brilliancy of style.

“The great poet of the eighteenth century is Watteau. His work is filled with the elegance of a world beyond human ken—the dream creation of a poet's mind. From the stuff of his brain, spun from his artist's fancy, woven with the web of his young genius, a thousand fairy flights wing their way. He drew from his imagination enchanted visions, and an ideal world beyond the comprehension of his age; the kingdom he built up was Shakespearian. Oh! theatre staged for how desirable a life! Oh! propitious land! woods, the retreat of lovers, fields resonant with



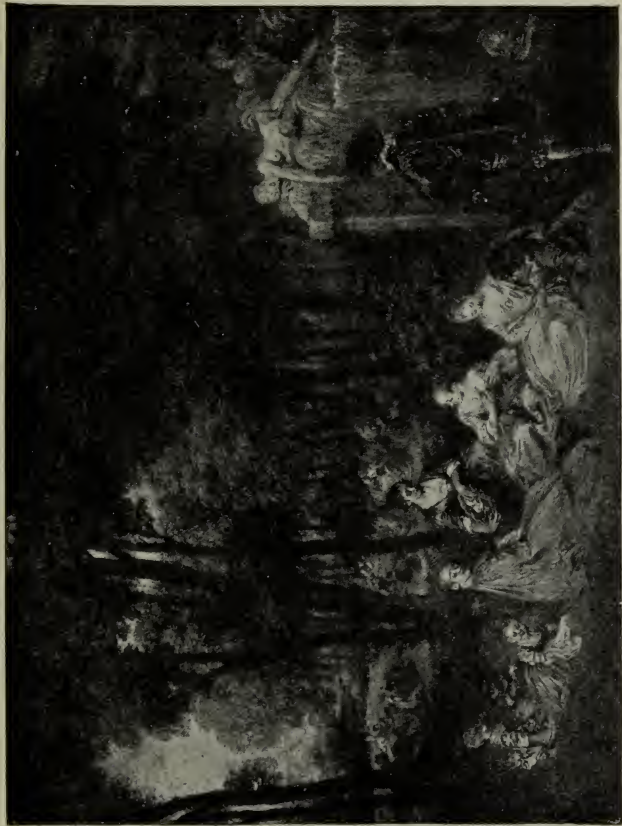
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music, groves where Echo loves to dwell !  
Arbours garlanded with flowers, wildernesses  
remote from the envious world, touched by the  
magic brush of Servandoni, refreshed with  
fountains, peopled with marble statues, where  
quivering leaves make a chequered shade !  
By suns of what apotheosis are you lighted ?  
What lovely gleams sleep upon your lawns ?  
What deep and tender and translucent greenery  
has strayed hither from Veronese's palette ?  
Garden shrubberies of rose and thorn, land-  
scapes of France set with Italian pines !  
Villages gay with weddings and coaches, decked  
out for feast and holiday, noisy with the sound  
of flutes and violins as they lead the procession  
to where, in a Jesuit temple, Opera weds with  
Nature ! Rural stage where the curtain is  
green and the foot-lights flowers, where French  
comedy steps on to the boards and Italian  
comedy capers !

“ Enchanted isles, cut off from land by a  
crystal ribbon, isles that know not care or  
sorrow, where Repose consorts with Shadow !  
Who are these who come slowly sauntering  
along paths that lead to nowhere ? And these,  
resting on their elbows to gaze at clouds and

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streams? Far away on the horizon Time sleeps beneath yon rustic roof. In this land known only to chance and with no name on the map, eternal indolence dwells beneath the trees. Sight and thought slumber ere they reach that dim, vague distance, dim and vague as the shifting barriers that bound the pictures of Titian. Lethe rolls its stream of silence through this Lotus land, and the faces of those that dwell there are all eyes and lips, a flame and a smile. . . . Flower girls pass, and as they go their rounds, bodices and high dressed hair grow gay with flowers. No noise is here, save the games of dark-eyed children, as they play at the feet of the grown-up couples like birds, or little genii, scattered by the poet on the threshold of this enchanted dream. To do nothing but listen to one's heart, to let one's fancy speak, to let the sun turn and the world wag, and little girls tease little dogs that never bark—this is the new Olympus and the new mythology, the deification of eighteenth century ideas, the soul of Watteau's age and society raised to the Pantheon of human moods and passions. Languor and Gallantry and Reverie, these are the new humours of ageing humanity



THE CHAMPS ELYSÉES (WALLACE COLLECTION)

*Photograph, Mansell & Co.*

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which the painter embodies and clothes in allegory. . . .

“Love is the light of this world; it fills and permeates it; it makes its youth and its serenity. Watteau’s paradise uncloses and reveals Cythera. Beneath a sky painted with all the hues of summer, Cleopatra’s galley swings moored to the shore. The water sleeps, the woods are silent. Between the lawns and the sky a swarm of little cupids hover and play and dance, fluttering their butterfly wings in the breathless air; and here below they weave their garlands of roses round pairs of lazy lovers, and up above they weave garlands of the kisses that mount from earth to heaven. . . .

“This is love, but poetic love; love that ponders and muses; modern love, with its yearnings and crown of sadness. Yes, in the heart of Watteau’s work there murmurs behind the laughing words, I know not what vague, slow harmony; I know not what musical melancholy lurks, gently contagious, in these ‘*fêtes galantes*.’ I know not what mysterious and plaintive poetry, siren-voiced as Venice, whispers sweet and low, to our ravished senses. The man shows himself in his work, and at

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last we come to look upon this work as the sport and the pastime of an ailing mind, the toy of a sick child who has died."

This last passage shows that the Goncourts felt to a certain extent Watteau's *inward meaning* in the manner in which we shall endeavour to define it when we study the influence of his illness on his painting. They have also noted, in another passage devoted to the psychology of his characters, "their vague-eyed courtship, their platonic gallantry, looks with no fever in them, embraces that show no touch of impatience, desire without appetite, pleasure without desire, gestures whose daring seems ordered as for a ballet, defences conducted with a cool and contemptuous security that betokens no fear of pressure." All these remarks show profound perspicacity and a keenly accurate choice of terms; they all make allusion to the qualities of *chastity* and *intangibility* in the dreams of a master who passed for so long as a painter of light and superficial love. The Goncourts' "I know not what" is precisely what it most behoves us to know. There lies the last and most essential term of our analysis, and we hope to determine it when

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we develop the theory that the knowledge of this "I know not what" may be arrived at by studying the symptom of the *love of the unattainable* in consumptives. Alas! this "I know not what" was not in Watteau's brain but in his lungs.

Caylus, who was a man of limited intelligence, with a want of understanding which, by dint of naïveté, sometimes led him to say the exact opposite of the truth, and thus help us to arrive at it by turning his meaning inside out, Caylus writes this strange sentence about Watteau: "As regards his expression I can say nothing, for he never attempted to portray any passion." For anyone who knows what meaning his age attached to the word *passion*, namely that of melodramatic exaggeration, this appreciation is no doubt true. It is true also in another sense. Caylus says it without understanding it, but he is vaguely struck by these platonic, these "embraces that show no touch of impatience," this "pleasure without desire." He feels, without being able to define it, the quality of intangibility, the supreme detachment of Watteau. Without passion! Ah! no, but with a single passion and a



LANDSCAPE (CHATSWORTH COLLECTION)

*Photograph, Mansell & Co.*



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highly metaphysical one, a passion for the idea, that all striving after those realities men call enjoyments is vain. Happiness for Watteau is to dream that happiness exists, a sentiment which is entirely modern and presages the pessimism of the romantic school, that disdainful pessimism which is enunciated in the second act of "Tristan and Isolde," and which Villiers de l'Isle Adam expressed in his "Axel" by an exclamation of his hero's when he achieves omnipotence, "What is the good of realising one's dreams? They are so beautiful! Live? One's servants can do that for one." This again might serve as a motto for Watteau's work. But Caylus in 1748 was incapable of even a glimmering understanding of this serene and despairing idealism; and the Goncourts, born realists as they were, only half grasped it with their minds, without approving it in their hearts. They themselves, by education and taste, were men of the eighteenth century, and everything goes to prove that no one living at the same time as Watteau, and later, could have thought as he did. Nothing is less cold than his works, and Caylus, though he denies him passion, does not think of reproaching him



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with coldness ; he is, however, struck only by his grace, and cannot understand this “melancholy of modern love,” because his age is one in which no one ever dreamt of associating love and melancholy ; it was an age that held pleasure as something apart from spiritual affection, and in which sensual enjoyment was incapable of provoking the sensations of immateriality and nothingness ; an age, in a word, whose spirit was absolutely contrary to the inmost secrets of Watteau’s lonely and exceptional soul.

This is the reason that the outward qualities of his work produced a current of imitation, while its “*inwardness*” failed to touch any of his contemporaries. This is why we may say that Watteau could not be understood by his century, and in no way represents the spirit of the age whose technique and decorative taste he inspired. He remains an intellectual exception as well as the master of a pictorial school.

His method of executing his masterpieces was admirable and peculiar. We have already seen how he reconciled the influences of Titian, Veronese, Rubens, and Ruysdael, and

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how he succeeded in re-constructing an absolutely individual technique, a "fluid and crystallised paste," as the Goncourts call it with great justice. His whole evolution tends in the direction of correcting his Flemish qualities, lessening their heaviness, and, while preserving their solidity and precision, etherealising them by the addition of Venetian elements, until the time comes when he relies upon himself alone, and in his turn invents. It seems as though Watteau attained originality by the inspired discovery of a new method of filling his canvases with atmosphere. It is his manner of distributing diffused lights which distinguishes his technique from all others, and confers upon it an inimitable degree of perfection. He notes with an astonishing precision, worthy of Van der Meer, folds of stuff and other details, in a thick and luscious preparation of oil. His contemporaries, indeed, reproached him with making an abuse of this method. He began by covering his canvas with a preparation which was both vague and copious, and upon this he afterwards, so to speak, chiselled in his details, treating them by means of "*impasto*." But



FINETTA (LOUVRE)

*Photograph, Giraudon*

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when this was accomplished, he devoted himself to making the air circulate by slightly altering the tonalities of the different parts, distributing, for instance, a series of blue or golden touches, as occasion required, so that the dominant tones of the sky reappeared again in the trees and figures, thus constituting a general harmony, a haze of diffused light. This witchcraft was also Claude Lorrain's; but Watteau invented a special manner of suggesting his magical effects by *dividing his tones*. In all his works the proper tone of each object is broken up into a certain number of tones, in which the sky tone always participates, and which, when seen at a distance, combine together again on the retina, and act and react upon each other by juxtaposition. This symphony of complementary colours, which may be minutely studied in *La Finette*, *L'Indifférent*, and *L'Embarquement pour Cythère*, is simply the principle of modern Impressionism. *L'Embarquement pour Cythère* is not only a typical Impressionist masterpiece, but the actual demonstration of those absolutely modern chromatic theories which go by the name of "*Pointillisme*." A perfect example of

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what these theories desire to establish may be seen in the painting of the ground in this picture, and the manner in which Watteau bathes his canvases in air is exactly that of Claude Monet. There is only a difference of degree, for Watteau, unlike our modern painters, does not go to the length of making the atmosphere his prime subject, and of abolishing the forms of the objects it envelops. He distinctly upholds the preponderating importance of drawing and of linear character. We have seen what an enthusiastic draughtsman he was, unlike our Impressionists. But he was the first to combine with the portrayal of forms, a method of general harmonisation by means of complementary colours.

He is thus the direct precursor of modern painting. The theory of the division of tones is scarcely to be met with in Boucher or Fragonard. Boucher prefers to remain faithful to Rubens' manner of smooth, liquid touches. To Fragonard alone, it sometimes occurs to make use of broken tones. He generally prefers, however, when desiring to convey the luminous "*envelope*" of his figures, to do so by means of what he called "clouds,"

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that is to say, a zone of intermediary tones between his silhouettes and his backgrounds. What the eighteenth century imitated in Watteau was not so much his technique as his subjects, his costumes, his composition, his flesh tones, his sharp profiles, his head-dresses, his fancies for "Chinoiseries" or for Spanish haughtiness, in a word, his style, his drawing, his taste, his red chalk and his three crayons. But Turner is full of the technique of divided tones. Delacroix, at a time when Watteau was scorned and outcast, discovered his vision of complementary colours, grasped its power, its vibrating light and its originality, and used it enthusiastically in his *Croisés*, large portions of which are treated by means of juxtaposed tonalities. This same technique may also be found in Bonington. In 1860 Monticelli, starving and unknown, began Watteau's work afresh. In his inspired dream-sketches, it was not only the master's decamérons and "fêtes galantes" that Monticelli resuscitated, while caring for nothing but the beauty of his material and leaving his figures mere dazzling patches of colour; it was Watteau's mosaic-like execution and its aspect as of many-hued

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gems, which the Marseilles colourist (himself steeped in the works of Rembrandt and the Venetian school) rediscovered and applied in so marvellous and spirited a manner. Watteau's grey greens and golden browns, his silvery glazes, his pale shimmerings and glowing effulgence live again on Monticelli's palette. He made his tones sing and thrill by means of juxtaposition at a time when neither the name nor the idea of Impressionism had been heard of. And when at last, in 1874, Monet began to put into practice his systematic theories about painting by means of vibrating spots of colour, it was to the tradition of *L'Embarquement pour Cythère* that he reverted, so that that picture is the most important of the whole French school. This technical innovation was brought about at the very moment when Renoir, Degas, and the "*Characterists*" were also reverting to the eighteenth century in their choice of "genre" subjects, in their picturesque groupings, and in their art of direct observation, as opposed to the dogmatic composition which was upheld by the Academicians. Now, with the exception of Chardin and La Tour, the whole eighteenth



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century derives from Watteau. It was therefore at the same moment that Watteau's importance, both as a master of technique and as an artistic inspirer, again became paramount. At the very same moment, moreover, the evolution of Baudelairean and Wagnerian sensibility was leading artists and critics to the possibility of understanding the *inward meaning* of his works. These things explain how, after long years of unjust neglect, Watteau appears to us now as a great initiator and a great master, and that, notwithstanding the light and fanciful aspect of his graceful subjects, we consider him as the most original and most representative master of French art. Watteau, Delacroix, and Manet are the three "beacons" of that art, the incarnations of the three epoch-making dates of the history of painting in France, the three originators of the great pictorial movements of their race.



## V

Watteau's character—The phases of his illness—His misanthropy, his disinterestedness, his fits of temper, his desire for solitude—The psychological side of his disease.

WATTEAU'S works, which, according to general opinion, were the glorification of love and gallantry and happiness, of calm and cheerful grace, were, as we have seen, produced by a sick man, the son of poor parents, a man acquainted with poverty, and harassed by obscure and ill-paid tasks, a man to whom fame came late and death early. That is to say, that the circumstances in which his works were produced seem to be in absolute opposition to the apparent upshot of the works themselves. The contrast is so evident that it is impossible not to be struck by it, directly we become acquainted with the story of Watteau's life. We are immediately confronted by two hypotheses: one, that the artist deliberately put

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into his work his dreams of that joy which had been refused him in real life; the other, that this work is not wholly disconnected with the life and character of its author, and that its joyousness is therefore only apparent. It may either be a reaction or an actual expression of self; in the latter case we must admit that its signification is different from the one it seems to bear.

Caylus and Gersaint have left us details of great interest as to their friend's character. The feature on which they chiefly insist is the wayward unconcern with which he treated the practical affairs of life. "An existence agitated by restlessness and by the disgust which he felt for himself and all mankind," says Caylus in a sentence we have already quoted. When Watteau leaves Valenciennes after his brief visit to his home, Caylus enumerates the practical reasons for his departure, and adds, "independently of the fact that every kind of satisfaction was short-lived with Watteau." "Enjoying an agreeable reputation, he had no enemy but himself and a certain spirit of instability which governed him. He was no sooner settled in a lodging



THE RETURN FROM THE CHASE (WALLACE COLLECTION)

*Photograph, Mansell & Co.*

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than he took a dislike to it. He changed dwellings hundreds and hundreds of times, and always alleged some excuse which he endeavoured to render specious out of shame of his behaviour." This is noted by the naive Caylus more acutely than he imagines, and is one of the characteristics of consumptive neurasthenia. The desire to travel and the making of important plans, which are constantly abandoned or changed, are to-day classed among the regular symptoms of this disease, a disease which drives the sufferer to an unreasoning activity, itself perhaps merely the reaction inspired by the presentiment of a premature end. Having but a short time to live, the sick man gives himself the illusion of longevity by rapid changes of occupation and scene; his over-wrought sensibility, still further excited by fever, helps him to imagine that his stay in each fresh scene has been a prolonged one. What in medical works would nowadays be called the "phobia" of residence, is what Watteau experienced in his various lodgings; and like all sick people of his category, he understood that this "phobia" must seem peculiar to healthy persons. He

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would therefore invent excuses of a practical nature and devoted much ingenuity to proving their urgency, though his own good sense recognised how little valid they were.

That Watteau was thus aware of his illness and his rapidly approaching death is indubitable, and is proved by all the principal traits of his character. His impatience and uneasiness put a very definite and special stamp on his faults and qualities. Doubtless we know little of his life, since his friends are practically dumb as to his relations with the other sex, and he himself jealously sought to conceal his thoughts as much as possible. But we are helped to an understanding of the essential portion of his soul by the manner in which what we do know of him corresponds with the logical phases of his illness. The restlessness and detachment of which his friends speak, while making him disagreeable to deal with, resulted in a misanthropy which, in the domain of art, enhanced the admirable dignity of his character.

As an artist, he was exceptionally disinterested, not only because of his uprightness, his magnanimity, and his love of art, but also from the very fact of his illness. How should

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he not have despised riches and fame, knowing as he did that he must soon die? If he worked so strenuously, it was not only in order to distract his thoughts, but in order to express himself to the utmost before the inexorable hour struck. He had been trained to poverty and isolation. The prodigious delicacy of his tastes led him to live in a wholly imaginary world, since, low-born working man as he was, penniless and unknown, it was impossible for him to find his models in the social circles from which everything alike excluded him. Sick and absorbed in his work, he was hardly likely to become worldly-minded in his decline. We have already seen what was his reply when Caylus admonished him in friendly fashion to look after his interests. "Isn't the worst that can happen to me the hospital? No one is refused admittance there." Caylus was quite incapable of unravelling the various feelings which dictated such an answer. He could only discern in it weariness, hypochondria, and over-wrought nerves; but there was much else—the spiritual exaltation of a genius, the pride of a poor man whose intellectual riches surpass all human luxury, the grief-touched

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serenity of a being who is conscious of his doom.

“It would seem as though the brilliant success he had with the public should have sufficiently flattered his self-conceit to make him proof against such trifling incidents. But he was so constituted as to take a dislike to nearly everything he did. I think that one of the strongest reasons for this dislike arose from his grand ideas on the subject of painting. For I can affirm that his ideal of art was far above his practice. This disposition caused him to view his works with very little favour. The price he received for them concerned him as little, and was much below what he might have obtained. The fact is, he did not care for money and attached no value to it. He thus found no encouragement in that love of gain which is such a powerful motive with so many men.” In corroboration of this passage of Caylus’, Gersaint adds: “His disinterestedness was so great that more than once he was exceedingly vexed with me for having desired to buy some of his works at a reasonable price, which he out of generosity refused.” Caylus relates that a certain wig-maker, having made



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Watteau a wig with which he declared himself delighted, asked, in lieu of payment, that the artist should give him in return some of his handiwork. Watteau gave him two pictures, and was then tormented by the scruple that he had offered too little ; so much so that when Caylus learnt the story, he had great difficulty in preventing him from sending the wily wig-maker a third picture.

Thus Watteau, from the material point of view, was absolutely indifferent and truly humble-minded. He was, however, neither timid nor a fool. On the contrary, he had a highly mocking and caustic temper. But he was so weak and so much absorbed in his dreams that he allowed himself to be overreached out of sheer weariness, and intruders were often able to extort from him works which he valued less than the moment's peace. He would even get rid of importunate visitors by these means and amused himself by describing their tactics and character to his friends. But he was sometimes pestered past bearing and his reputation weighed on him heavily. Caylus has left us a curious anecdote about a miniature-painter, who used to go about everywhere dis-



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coursing on the subject of art and boasting of the advice he was in the habit of giving the greatest masters. This person managed to extract a small picture out of Watteau. Caylus told his friend about the miniature-painter's impertinence, and Watteau, greatly vexed, declared he would not have offered him anything if he had known his true character, but that he would not forget. Shortly after, the individual in question had the audacity to call upon Watteau, bringing the picture with him, and while thanking him for the gift, pointed out a few necessary corrections. Watteau offered to make them, and taking a brush full of oil, in one moment totally effaced his work. Then, when the miniaturist got angry, he dismissed him, saying, with much severity, that he had no business to speak so arrogantly to masters greatly superior to himself.

"I noticed with pain," says his biographer again, "that Watteau was continually the victim of his surroundings, and was all the more to be pitied inasmuch as his wits grasped the situation, while his weakness was too much for him. . . . His restlessness was continually driving him to make new acquaintances." At

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the same time his love of solitude is constantly noted. The contradiction is only apparent. Watteau, in truth, was *twofold*, and his healthy self looked on, so to speak, at the actions of the other. When he was in the grip of a fit of neurasthenia, brought on by a recrudescence of his lung trouble, he shunned society. But the moment he grew better, his taste for company returned and he experienced that intense need for tenderness, unrestrained confidence and emotional joy, which is the characteristic of all consumptives ; and this tenderness and confidence he loved for themselves, without paying much heed to the character of the persons in whom he sought them. The same symptom may be remarked in all who suffer from this disease. In many this propensity to emotion takes the form of sensual excess, and a violent need of expending themselves. They thus obtain an illusion of strength in which their highly strung nerves delight. By the terrible irony of consumption, they are driven to assert their vitality in a manner which proves fatal, and are haunted by a desire to create life and make proof of organic strength, out of a kind of unconscious reaction



THE TERRACE PARTY (DRESDEN GALLERY)

*Photograph, Giraudon*

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against death. Watteau does not seem to have suffered from this form of the illness. As far as we can judge he was chaste in his conduct, had not much power of endurance, and husbanded his strength, devoting all his energies to his work and his dreams. Caylus, Gersaint, and M. de Julienne speak of him in the following terms :—

“ He was of medium height and insignificant appearance, his eyes showed neither talent nor liveliness. He was sombre and melancholy, and like all persons of an atrabilious temperament, naturally sober and incapable of any excess. The purity of his conduct scarce allowed him to enjoy the libertinage of his mind, which was rarely apparent in his speech. He was not carried away by any passion, nor governed by any vice, and he never painted anything obscene. He even carried his fastidiousness to such a length, that a few days before his death he expressed his desire to get back some of his works, which in his opinion were not sufficiently free from this blemish, so that he might have the satisfaction of burning them, and this he did.”

We must recollect that by “libertinage”

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Caylus means to convey what nowadays we should call "fancy," with a shade of meaning which is a little difficult to translate, but which Schumann intended to render when he called one of his pianoforte pieces "Humoreske," fearing that his interpretation of the word "gemüthlich" would not be understood. It was not till much later that the term "libertine" acquired its modern meaning of dissolute. Gersaint uses it also.

"Watteau was of medium height and weakly constitution. His character was restless and changeable. He was headstrong, libertine in mind, but virtuous in conduct; impatient and timid, cold and shy at first approach, retiring and reserved with strangers, a kind though touchy friend; misanthropical; a sharp and biting critic, always dissatisfied with himself and others; slow to forgive. He was exceedingly fond of reading, which was the sole amusement of his leisure hours, and though no scholar, he was capable of giving a sound opinion on a work of letters." And M. de Julienne writes: "Of medium height and sickly constitution, he had a quick and penetrating mind and lofty sentiments; he spoke

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little but well, and wrote the same ; he was almost constantly meditating. A great admirer of nature and of those masters who copied her ; assiduous work had made him slightly melancholy ; cold and shy at first approach, which sometimes occasioned discomfort to his friends and often to himself ; he had no other faults."

After this unanimity of opinion, no doubt is possible. Watteau was a man whose inward life was intense, but whose outward life was practically nil. We shall see, when we study his methods of composing and painting, as recorded by Caylus, that they were those of a man of intuition, of an inventor and dreamer, who based himself on drawings made from nature, but who, in creating his pictures, was inspired by the spontaneous caprice of his mental vision, the vision of a painter of dreams *par excellence*. His malady followed the usual course. When he went to England he was already doomed. It is possible that he may have wished to consult a celebrated physician of the day, Doctor Mead. It is also possible that he merely yielded to the importunities of chance friends or to his eternal desire for

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change. What Caylus calls his "atrabilious" humour had nothing in common with hepatic hypochondria; it was simply the nervous depression caused by the feverish attacks of a consumptive patient, who has none of the characteristics of emphysema. Watteau's phthisis was not of the congestive and sanguine type which leads to violence and to fits of rage or sensuality; it took the form rather of languor and gradual decline, and resulted in transforming this young man of genius into a phantom living only for his dreams. His disease developed between the years 1705 and 1721. We do not know what kind of medical treatment he received, but it was no doubt worthless, seeing the state of medical science at the time. And in any case it must have come too late, for it is certain that Watteau cannot have tried any serious treatment until the year 1710, when he emerged from poverty. For his disease to have taken fifteen or sixteen years to go through the three stages of consumption, he must have realised that for such delicacy as his, chastity, sobriety, and a retired life would be the best cure. His stay in England no doubt hastened the end, but his



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days were already counted when he went there. There is something terrible in the thought that modern preventive methods, over-nourishment, systematic antiseptics, and regular winterings in the South, which Watteau never visited, would doubtless (for he was sensible and amenable) have stayed the fatal malady, which had been started by the bad food and dismal winters spent in the attic of the Pont Notre-Dame, and that thus there would have been saved to France and to art the greatest creator of beauty produced by the eighteenth century.

The shyness of his manners (though mitigated at times by his native goodness of heart), the hopeless idealism which these manners betokened, the extreme delicacy of his tastes, his reserve, his instinctive kindness, so prompt to make amends for the hastiness of his misanthropical temper—everything, in short, goes to prove that Watteau was not one of those consumptives who consciously struggle against their disease, thus experiencing the worst horrors of despair and anguish, and turning mad and cruel out of sheer terror; he was, on the contrary, a resigned consumptive, one of





THE GATHERING IN A PARK (LOUVRE)

*Photograph, Giraudon*

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those who take refuge in work, and in the mystical or sentimental outpouring of their dreams. The words of Egæus in Poe's story of "Berenice" might be applied to Watteau, "The realities of the world affected me as visions, and as visions only, while the wild ideas of the land of dreams became in turn, not the material of my everyday existence, but in very deed that existence utterly and solely in itself." Such was Watteau, in his life as in his art. We may rest assured that he was supported in both by great moral beauty and rare courage. His neurasthenia, indeed, was constantly held within normal limits by his strength of will. He controlled himself well enough to betray nothing but a certain amount of irritability, common to all creators, even the healthiest, when they are overworked, and a feverish and unconscious waywardness in the choice of his outward surroundings. There is no trace in his work of the fear of death nor of any neurotic bitterness or injustice—with the exception of a few malicious drawings against doctors, whose ignorance must indeed have been brought forcibly home to him. He left his friends such recollections as we have just

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quoted. His end was dignified and uncomplaining, touched with a final fervour which reminds one of Pascal's last years, but without Pascal's austerity. He accepted his unhappy lot without flinching, and not for one moment did he hold those who surrounded him responsible for his sufferings, or attempt to torment them, as is commonly the case with those consumptives whose illness makes them harassing and unjust towards others. His delicate constitution, weakened by the privations of his youth, fell a victim to consumption, but he never passed through those moments of passionate and vindictive revolt, ending in attacks of suffocation, which are frequent in the case of congestive and emphysematic patients, in whom pulmonary inflammation threatens to spread to the intestine and liver. His light waned and wasted without giving forth any of those startling flashes which are sometimes cast over a doomed existence by the frenzied desire for life. All that we have been saying of his life and temperament has its exact parallel in his work.

In this work lay his sole consolation and his dearest "*raison d'être*"; it was at once his

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confession and his immortal bequest to mankind. With a coquetry and grace which are inexpressibly pathetic, he unaffectedly desired to make of this life-work of his, a smile and nothing more. He wished to celebrate that part of existence which he had not been able to live in reality. He dreamt it beneath the tall trees of the Luxembourg, and in the majestic gardens of Versailles, where he strayed in youthful meditation. While other geniuses attacked by the same illness have bequeathed us their tempestuous passions like Chopin, their lyrics soarings like Schubert, their pessimism like Laforgue, and their sombre voluptuousness like Albert Samain, Watteau, more comparable to Keats and Novalis, seems to have wished to express with increasing emphasis a day-dream, which was at once harmonious, chaste, and metaphysical, unbounded by space or time, and ending in a diaphanous, eurhythmic, and vague idealism, which reminds one of certain of Edgar Poe's poems.<sup>1</sup> But it remains

<sup>1</sup> I allude, for instance, to "Helen" or to the "Sleeper," and to some of the Tales, such as "The Island of the Fay," or the "Domain of Arnheim," a real Watteau landscape. Poe was not consumptive

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to be seen whether this work is not artificial in its construction—a pleasing façade raised by the shrinking modesty of a sick man to screen his misery from the eyes of the world—or whether profound grief does not lurk in this smile of his, which is so singular, so touching, so mysterious, and so absolutely remote from the loose laughter of the eighteenth century. How far have we here a disguise, how far a confession? How far is the work representative of the man who created it? Does it represent his illusions as to life, his magic fashion of transforming reality? Does it hide, on the contrary, a grief he would not betray? This is what we shall learn by a general enquiry into the composition and colouring of this series of works which was interrupted by death in the very year which saw the birth of Mme. de Pompadour, Louis XV.'s consumptive mistress.

himself, but his mother and wife were ; and we may say without improbability, that the inherited constitution of the former and the spectacle of the latter's end may be traced in this part of Poe's work, and to some extent entered into the composition of that formidable genius.

## VI

Watteau's illness traced in the inward signification of his work—*L'Indifférent* and *l'Embarquement pour Cythère* studied from this point of view — Chastity and voluptuousness of Watteau's works : his art, the poem of unsatisfied desire.

WATTEAU'S work may be classed, as we have seen, under the head of paintings, of which there are three categories, and of drawings, of which there are a considerable number. The first series (decorative art and Italian comedy) is the forerunner of the third (Pastorals). Between these two is interposed, as an episode, the set of military scenes. His drawings, to which Watteau attached more importance than to his pictures, form a repertory of gestures and expressions from which he drew when composing his pictures. No classification can be absolutely accurate ; it would be difficult to place in one or other of these series the few mythological scenes whose technique is

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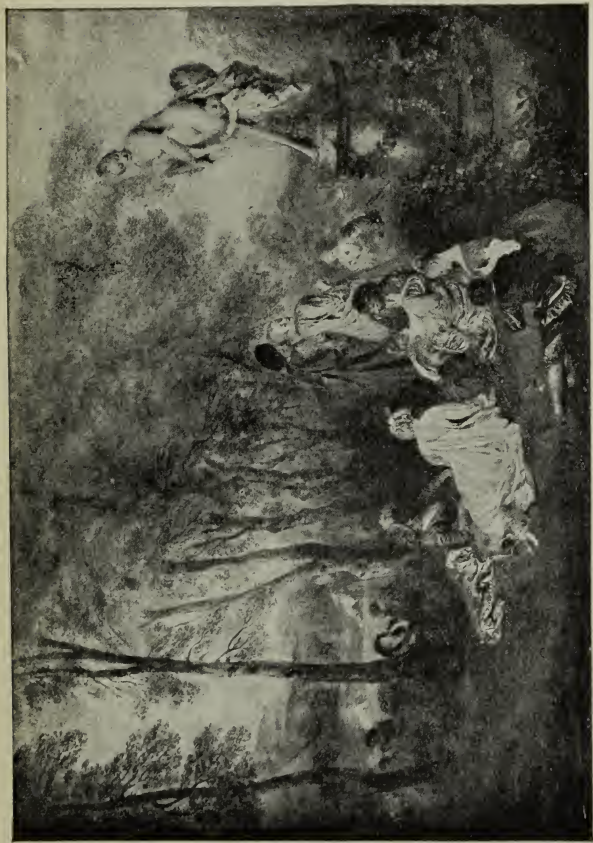
inspired by Rubens and Titian (*Antiope* and *Autumn*), or the decorative works, such as those which were executed in collaboration with Gillot and Audran. We cannot form an estimate of the number of these works, of which the greater part have disappeared, either because the changes of fashion decreed their removal,<sup>1</sup> or because of the destruction of the private houses in which they were placed. We must note in particular that Watteau painted a quantity of little figures for insertion into Gillot's and Audran's panels and ceilings, and also as decorations of hand-screens, folding screens, and coach-panels. He was, indeed, the first to invent those "chinoiseries," which

<sup>1</sup> Besides the ravages of the Revolution, we must remember that during the Empire and later on, at the time when the abominable taste, known as Louis Philippe, prevailed, actual acts of vandalism were committed in France, in order to obliterate all traces of eighteenth century style. This methodical and inveterate destruction may be observed at Versailles itself. The treatment bestowed by Jesuit taste on Gothic art has here been meted out by stucco, whitewash, and scraping, which have accomplished their unholy work and proved immeasurably disastrous.

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the eighteenth century took up and imitated with so much delight, and which gave rise to the conventional orientalism of that period. In this manner he decorated the King's private room at the Château de la Muette. The decorations have disappeared, but we still have the engravings made from them by Boucher, Jaurat, and Aubert, and at the Albertina of Vienna may be seen a drawing by Watteau, which is an accurate study of a real Chinaman called Tsao. He also painted many of those "singeries" which were equally in vogue, and which are to be found as late as Chardin, as late even as Decamps, and with which Teniers had already amused himself. He decorated Crozat's dining-room with the panels of the four seasons, of which Caylus speaks with contempt, attributing the first draughts to M. de la Fosse. The Goncourts possessed two fine drawings of these. Watteau even decorated the lids of harpsichords; in a word, he painted every kind of thing with the greatest unconcern, and it is impossible to determine accurately the chronological order of works so manifold and so hurried. M. R. Dohme has attempted to do so, but, in spite of most careful reasoning,





COUNTRY PLEASURES (DRESDEN GALLERY)

*Photograph, Braur, Clément & Cie, Dornach, Paris, and New York*

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has not always succeeded. What may be affirmed is, that the decorative and ornamental works were the earliest; that the first studies of "chinoiserie," of "singerie," and of scenes from Italian comedy, came before the military pictures painted at Valenciennes from Villars' soldiers, who fought at Malplaquet in 1709; that, in a few rustic scenes, such as *L'Abreuvoir*, *Le Marais*, *La Guinguette*, and *Le Repas de Campagne*, Teniers' influence precedes Rubens', and finally that his stay with Crozat, beginning in 1716, had a decisive influence on the growth of Watteau's genius. In Crozat's hotel in the Rue Richelieu, and especially in his country house at Montmorency, the artist developed his two principal tendencies. The hotel contained four hundred pictures belonging to the Venetian and Flemish schools, and thousands of drawings, of which it is said that two hundred and twenty-nine were by Rubens, a hundred and twenty-nine by Van Dyck, a hundred and six by Veronese, and a hundred and three by Titian. Here Watteau enthusiastically studied the masters he had not hitherto seen, and his genius gathered strength. The studies from nature done in Crozat's park at Montmorency

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were the continuation of those he had painted in the gardens of the Luxembourg and Versailles. Thanks to this two-fold influence, he realised at last his proper bent, forgot the military scenes which were no longer before his eyes, and in which he had imitated Teniers and even Callot, and entered once for all into his own domain—the domain of the *Pastorals*. As for the scenes from Italian comedy, it is probable that he continued to produce them throughout his whole life. But as we have said that they preceded the military pictures, we must endeavour not to appear inconsistent. In Watteau, modifications of expression are so important that they suffice to alter the whole character of a picture. It is true that he began by painting actors and was encouraged to do so by Gillot. He produced many youthful works of this kind. It is no less true that during his most important period he recurred to these subjects. But if the costumes remained the same, the spirit was changed. The actors he painted after his stay with Crozat, when he was at the zenith of his powers, were indeed actors, but they had become the boon companions of that idealised society of

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the Pastorals, from which the painter's genius finally eliminated them altogether. For a considerable time they represented in that society the elements of verisimilitude and anecdote. But when reality and anecdote could no longer help Watteau's soul to sing its dreams, they disappeared. Thus the initial motives date indeed from the period of his youth, and yet traces of them may still be found as late as in 1718. It is as impossible to affix limits to these things, as it is to determine the moments in which the shaping influences of his pictorial development arose or ended. We see, indeed, the successive intervention of Gillot, Teniers, Rubens, Titian, and Veronese. We note the immediate influence of Titian in *Antiope*, and observe in *Autumn* the moment when Watteau's technique becomes at once French and personal. In pictures like *Le Plaisir Pastoral* in the gallery of Chantilly, we remark the entirely Flemish quality of the landscape and a style which is peculiar to the painting of Kermesses, and yet the refined and nervous elegance of the later pictures is already visible. In some of the nudes (*Antiope*, the Chantilly *Amour Désarmé*,

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the *Diane au Bain*, belonging to Mme. Christine Nilsson) we can trace a blending of Italy and Flanders. But we must remember that these different currents are synchronous, that the awakening of Watteau's genius was extraordinarily complex, and that all his periods were, so to speak, condensed and fused by desperate haste. The miraculous moment when, after all these varied influences and feverish experiments, the master's exquisite sensibility became transfigured into something unparalleled and inimitable, may be placed with the greatest probability during his visit to Crozat. The influence of nature combined with that of the great masters of the past to show him all that his former poverty had forced him to imagine. We must not forget another element equally fortunate; while staying with Crozat, Watteau was able to study at his ease those ladies of fashion whom hitherto he had been obliged to sketch under difficulties in the streets or parks. For the first time he found models who answered to his dreams. All these circumstances, which combined to give unity to his genius, took place within a period of eight or nine years,

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and during this time the most significant date in the development of Watteau's works and personality is that of his stay with Crozat.

From works like *L'Amante Inquiet* and *Le Donneur de Sérénade* in the Chantilly gallery, he passes to pictures like *L'Amour au Théâtre Français* and *L'Amour au Théâtre Italien*, which are the high water mark of the artist's talent. He is here absolute master of his form, while his subjects are still drawn from fanciful comedy. In the first picture he represents the gods of Olympus dressed in the quaint and heteroclite costume of eighteenth century opera—a document of exquisite charm. But the dancing woman in this picture is already a dream creature, a figure of the Pastorals, sweet and sad. In *L'Amour au Théâtre Italien* we have the classic company assembled; Harlequin, Mezzetin, Columbine, Pierrot, and the Doctor are listening to a serenade by the light of a torch and a lantern. The dim glimmer of the moon is contrasted with the reddish glow of the torch, and the effects of light and shade are masterly. The *Gilles* in the Louvre also belongs to this period, and is one of the finest pictures that has ever been painted. A work





GILLES (LOUVRE)

*Photograph, Giraudon*

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of absolute maturity as regards the mastery of its technique, its inspiration is transitional, and of all Watteau's pictures is perhaps the one which can best help us to understand the transformation his mind underwent. Gilles, or, as we call him, Pierrot, is standing before us, all in white, his hands hanging at his sides; he has on a blouse and short, wide trousers made of satin, which is bathed in a golden and exquisite light. Nothing can be finer than this symphony of white, warming to pale gold, and cooling to silver in the shadows. Gilles stands there, a little simple, with his kind face mildly astonished, unspeakably resigned, yet amiable for all his uneasiness and melancholy. His whole being expresses a kind of sentimental trustfulness, at once touching and laughable; candour and inoffensive sadness are stamped on his rather blunt features, his baby mouth, his prominent eyes, and his unruffled brow. Behind this tall figure, the heads of his companions emerge over the edge of a bank; Harlequin, audacious and sniggering, Columbine, the Doctor, black and spiteful, perched on a donkey whose gentle and despairing gaze it is impossible to forget. They seem to be



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plotting something together against their white comrade, their poor butt, love's eternal dupe and victim. There is in this picture such a mixture of grace, of sadness and smiles, of factitiousness and depth, that it troubles and harrows us, and we stand before it, divided between enthusiasm for the radiant execution, and wonder at the spirit of the work, which is so absolutely foreign to the feeling of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. In this picture Watteau reveals himself as a phenomenon unrelated to his age. But the dream which he shows us here was only formulated in its entirety during the last years of his life.

We have remarked before that it was at the time of Watteau's stay with Crozat that he became definitely aware of his powers, and abandoned the painting of military scenes and ornamental art; it was at the same moment too (1716) that his illness conclusively declared itself. From this time forward his humour becomes restless; he begins his perpetual roving, driven by his morbid desire for change, first to stay with Sirois, then to the cloisters and deserted gardens of the Faubourg Saint

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Victor with Breughels, thence to England, then again to stay with Gersaint, finally to Nogent. These are the successive stages in the progress of a dying man. His reception at the Academy took place in the year 1712. It marks the end of Watteau's poverty, difficulties, and obscurity;<sup>1</sup> between 1712 and 1716 Watteau paints his nudes, reverts to Gillot's subjects, and develops his talent; between 1716 and 1718 comes his visit to Crozat. At this period, too, his consumption passes from the first phase to the second and becomes incurable. Ease and comfort had come too late. His stay with Crozat, fortunate as it was in some respects, did not

<sup>1</sup> We may here note in passing that the details of Watteau's reception by the Academy have been strenuously contested. M. Séailles, in especial, declares such a reception to be highly improbable, and draws the conclusion that Gersaint must have been led into some error. It is true that the tale is singular. But Caylus does not contradict it, and why should Gersaint have made a mistake? There has been no real refutation. We can only suppose that M. de la Fosse had already made Watteau's acquaintance through Crozat, and that he did not discover him as Gersaint relates, but gave him his warm recommendation out of friendship.

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arrest the progress of his disease, and here, by a heart-rending irony of fate, his genius and his doom were both determined. He left Crozat a condemned man, and he left him to begin the portion of his work that is immortal. He became master of all his powers at the very moment in which Death's weapons were ready for him. There are many Watteaus, but the real, the unique Watteau, the Watteau whom the history of art will always remember with pious veneration, is the Watteau of the years 1717-1721, the Watteau of the Pastorals, the Watteau on whom already lay the hand of Death.

From the time that he left Crozat, to become a solitary, sad, and silent vagabond, with his genius and his illness for ever at his side like good and evil angels, he lived only in the world of dreams. But it is false to speak of his good and evil angels—they make but one. His genius was quickened by his illness, his illness by his genius. During this period Watteau worked more passionately than ever. Immersed as he was in the ideal, he no longer troubled about anecdotal truth; only once did he revert to realism—and then with what

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elegance !—to paint Gersaint's *Sign*.<sup>1</sup> He did it to “unstiffen his fingers” on his return from England, to put himself once more in contact with life. This work, indeed, is one of his most accomplished masterpieces from a technical point of view. But it is an exception. Realistic figures are more and more eliminated from his works; he began by making the Italian actors his whole subject; later on he mingled with them imaginary and nameless beings whose undefined grace was enhanced by the motley brilliance of the former; and finally these beings remain alone. Watteau arrives at that conception which Caylus defined with such complete misapprehension. “His compositions have no object, they express no passion, and are consequently lacking in one of the most attractive qualities in painting—namely action.” No object? True indeed!

<sup>1</sup> This sign, which is of large proportions, represents Gersaint's shop as seen from the street and contains a dozen or so figures, workmen packing up a picture, and ladies and gentlemen examining others. This admirable work, which for some unknown reason was divided into two pieces, now belongs to the German Emperor.



L'INDIFFÉRENT (LOUVRE)

*Photograph, Giraudon*

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Watteau's pictures no longer *represent* anything. No action? Nay, verily! No passion? Nay, once more! We are in the presence of dreams. The life of these works has become entirely inward. Their object is to create a paradise of melancholy love, a morbid and enchanted vision which has out-distanced passion, action, time and place, such as we understand them, and has become purely contemplative. Disease planted in Watteau's soul an element undreamt of in his age—an element almost of mysticism. The sprightly anecdotist of Italian Comedy becomes a poet of the mind and its states. And so profound a poet is he, that the whole eighteenth century, though following him as a master of technique, remains unconscious of his psychology and shares the opinion of Caylus—is incapable, indeed, of holding any other. Henceforth Watteau is an alien in his age and a precursor of the most subtle of our modern investigators. He becomes a genius who has no date and is the debtor of no man.

A little picture in the Louvre, *L'Indifférent*, is the perfect symbol of his genius. It is a gem of painting, and never has such mysterious

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richness of "*matière*" been attained. But its feeling also is a revelation. This innocent-faced young man, as he passes along with his absent-minded glance and his rhythmic tread, as he almost dances along, scarce touching the ground with his delicate satin shoes, this young man, whose arm, graceful and wavering, seems to be scattering imaginary flowers, is Watteau's art, is Watteau's very soul, sadly and gently setting aside the whole dissolute eighteenth century—nay the whole of life itself. "Let me alone with my dreams," he seems to say; "I ask nothing of men; I want nothing; I am going." And whither is he going, this slight creature dressed in pink and blue, this gentle, careless, weary being? He is going to the land of Watteau, to that rustic fairy-land which is both real and unreal; he is going to seek forgetfulness and silence; he is going, clothed in the colours of joy, to enter the realms of sadness. This clearly is the meaning of this little picture which is pregnant with such profound emotion, and which whispers so gently in our ear the whole poem of a stricken soul. All of Watteau is here in the symbolism of his colours. This extraordinary painter has but to



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take the tenderest tints amongst those which usually express the sweetest and softest emotions, to arouse feelings of the most mysterious melancholy. Compare him for a moment with Lemoyne, Boucher, and Nattier. He is even tenderer than they in his faded blues, his pinks which are as rosy as a child's cheek, his drabs and greys, his honeyed yellows which remind one of a Flemish maiden's locks. His little mother-of-pearl canvases shimmer like the inside of a shell or like the ear of a blushing girl. They have the charm of the sweetest nosegay. And yet divine melancholy, whom the others knew not, sits enthroned in his work; these faint expiring blues, softer than even pastel could make them, these transparent carnations, fill us with all the sadness of an autumn twilight. The contrast of cheerful colour and morbid expression is one of the most singular, one of the least explicable elements of the master's charm. He never sufficiently formulated his sadness to require the help of colours in giving it expression. He managed to express and suggest it without them. On the contrary, it was a contrast in which he took pleasure. If he makes use of





THE EMBARKMENT FOR CYTHERA (BERLIN ACADEMY)

*Photograph, Braun, Clément & Cie, Dornach, Paris, and New York*

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such colours as golden browns, dark reds, bitumens and oxydised greens, it is only in order that a deep and mellow bass may accompany the gold and rosy song of his triumphant and health-breathing nudes. Of all the means by which we signify sadness, he would have none, and his sadness, decked and adorned as it is, fills us all the more with wonder.

He reveals his thought by means of attitude alone. Look at *L'Embarquement pour Cythère*; this picture, this wonder of wonders, is of paramount importance in the French school; it has influenced the whole English school; and the eighteenth century, without ever probing its ultimate secret, was completely under its dominion. Look at this picture, either at the sketch, which is in the Louvre, or at the definite work, which is at Potsdam, and is perhaps not so fine, not so suggestive as the sketch. We find here the whole synthesis of Watteau's soul, the whole secret of his composition. Here, as in almost all his works, the foreground is on a height and the background is seen in bird's-eye perspective. On the undulations of the ground are ordered, as in a sinuous garland, a series of silhouettes. We

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cannot tell where we are ; it is indeed a land of dreams, that knows neither time nor place. The figures are seen from the back or in three-quarters view. Some there are who linger and embrace timidly ; others go down into the valley, and as they go, half turn their heads, as with longing for some vision they are leaving. Joyless and silent, with no laughter on their lips, they turn their steps to the golden galley which is to take them to the enchanted isle. And what of this isle ? We know nothing. On the further side of the green and golden water, shimmering with reflections, range blue and lofty peaks. They fade and vanish into nothingness in a delicious mist. All, indeed, is vague and shifting. Little Loves, like twilight clouds, hover and play and float in the air. The scene is at once true and fantastic ; the tints are those of autumn. As we gaze at this landscape we end by feeling the same slow hesitation as the persons themselves. Is this happiness ? Does her way lie there indeed ? Watteau has painted once for all that abstract and immaterial region in which each one of us may place his ideal and which has no existence. With a material art he has realised the miracle

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of representing a domain which it seemed only possible to evoke with music. 'Tis over blue and silent abysses that these beings whom he shows us bend. They are all bowed; their steps hesitate, their movements falter; supple as they are, they walk wearily; wearily they loiter. They are creatures without will, that know no haste, untouched by fever, bereft even of desire. We feel them enamoured of unknowable Infinity, and little by little, as we gaze, the whole picture seems to give the lie to its title and doubt seizes upon us. There lurks in it all a kind of frightful sweetness.

All Watteau's characters are disillusioned. "What is the good?" they seem to ask. They brush aside everything with a careless gesture; they are not "indifferent"; they are oblivious, they are "blasé" without ever having lived. Love itself gives them no emotion. They caress, but cannot clasp. They desire, but know that desire is the best of love, that possession is disappointment, that no realisation can equal hope. Creatures that seem not to live their life! As they walk up and down, as they saunter past, they are absorbed in their day-dreams. They perform the acts of life



THE FOUNTAIN (WALLACE COLLECTION)

*Photograph, Mansell & Co.*

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without conviction; they seem to live in obedience to the rhythm of a mysterious music that lurks in their little souls. In all Watteau's works there is perhaps not a single sensual gesture, if we except the *Faux Pas* of the Louvre; not a single sensual face, unless it be the *Mezzetin Chantant* of the Hermitage. Watteau's women are *décolletées*; they show their fresh faces and youthful bosoms, but the mysteries of their dress are inviolable and no one could give them a thought. These young men and women mingle freely, but they only come near enough for each to feel the mutual thrill of their desire, and this caress, which is no caress, but an emanation, is a joy so subtle that beside it all the realities of love would seem to them coarse fare indeed. They prolong indefinitely the delicious intoxication of desire, without falling into the error of satisfying it. They understand the inevitable heart-sickness that would follow. And even when we see beside them the glasses and pasties of an out-door repast, they are not eating but dreaming. As Paul Verlaine says in a line of his "Fêtes Galantes," which is a marvellous definition of the souls of Watteau's characters,

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“ils n'ont pas l'air de croire à leur bonheur.” Nothing profounder will ever be said of them. Are not these groups of Watteau's the absolute antithesis of Rubens? After the Kermesse of wine and the orgy of flesh, comes the ideal Kermesse where all is ethereal. And how are we to explain this strangeness of sentiment, this idealism, this gentle, graceful, melancholy renunciation, this all pervading power of dreams, these slim and pure and tender beings, who bend in a kind of azure swoon over visionary horizons such as Ruysdael loved, how are we to explain all this at the time of the Regency, a few years before Boucher, with his oily voluptuousness, gave expression to the sensual ideal of a set of worldlings? How are we to explain it if not by Watteau's illness? Conceive what solitude, what struggles, what strength of isolation must have gone towards the making of his genius, before he lighted upon this unparalleled beauty and became the incarnate contradiction of his age.

Everything in Watteau's works expresses the unsatisfied yearning of a consumptive who is chaste and who wishes to remain so. His creatures live on the edge of gulfs that are



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blue with a blue unknown to man, more strangely disquieting than the blue of Leonardo's glaciers—gulfs against which are silhouetted slopes clothed with lofty and golden-tufted trees, and watered with meandering streams. And then, on a sudden, the features of nature melt and vanish in an ineffable ravishment of turquoise mist. Only a few more steps and these beings will enter the infinity of dreams. Their slight souls are wafted by a breath of music. No, verily, they do not belong to their age. To see no more, to hear no more, to dwell apart, tall and slender, in a shadowy land, this is their ideal, and the ideal of the unquiet consumptive who created them after the image of his soul. Through him the "*mal de l'infini*" has added a new grace to art, but a grace we shall not properly understand, unless we consider it as the expression of that particular suffering that springs from the feeling of the soul's impossibility to find an outlet in desire. He who carries this feeling in his bosom may, like Watteau, lie open to the calls of mind and pleasure; but none the less he is a being for whom life is but the mask of essential existence. As a result of the artist's





THE DANCE: IRIS (BERLIN ACADEMY)

*Photograph, Braun, Clement & Cie, Dornach, Paris, and New York*

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consumption he became fervently spiritual. M. Péladan has the following striking sentence : "Love is the attractive form of pain." This is the proper inscription for work like Watteau's. For his characters who "*n'ont pas l'air de croire à leur bonheur*," love is an exquisite means of suffering, and of experiencing the thrill of unattainable infinity, which the finite creature can only incarnate for a moment. No pain can approach the disappointment of a soul, intoxicated by the dream of a lasting and perfect communion, and yet able to attain only its fleeting image through the flesh. Watteau's characters, so tenderly sad on the edge of an azure mirage, for ever remind us that another's soul is intangible, and that the love of a man for a woman is but the attempt of a perishable mortal to attain the undying. And this swooning, fainting, fading blue is the very colour of the promised land.

Let no one be deceived by Watteau's liveliness and taste, by his grace and love of luxury. All his works are stanzas of a single poem. Even when he paints children, his language is the same. What infinite sadness is expressed by the attitude of the little

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princess in the picture of *La Danse*,<sup>1</sup> as she moves erect, slowly, and sedately, while a number of little lords, dressed up like fairy villagers, watch her and play the flute! What grandeur there is in the melting landscape of *L'Amour à la Campagne*!<sup>2</sup> What nobility in the *Fête* of the Edinburgh Gallery! The loftiness of his melancholy is what we must love in Watteau. It is only thus that we shall understand and honour him aright and in his entirety—in his pure and solitary art. Thus we find, forecast by a consumptive, the idea from which springs all our latter-day art, the idea that inspires “Tristan and Isolde”—that it is impossible for desire to grasp the infinite, and impossible for it to care in truth for the visible world. Such was the contribution made to his generation by this artist of lowly birth, who, by the exceptional strength of his contemplative faculties, and by his power of transporting himself from actual life to a life beyond, was able to create a visionary universe, and recognise in nature the magic of his own beauty. So, a nightingale's song on a moonlight night in

<sup>1</sup> German Emperor's collection.

<sup>2</sup> Same collection.

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spring invites us to tears, and yet is but the expression of the ecstatic joy of a tiny creature—for once reach a certain degree of sublimity, and love, beauty, pain, and joy become the inseparable elements of ecstasy; thus, beneath Watteau's silken and smiling tenderness, lies sleeping a sweet and fearful sensation of the hollowness of things—and this hollowness is the abyss that he has painted, blue and dim. The “mal de l'infini” is common to a whole series of minds which form a family apart in the arts. Each one contributes his poem, but the scenery has been painted once for all in *L'Embarquement pour Cythère*.

## VII

Watteau's place in the French school—His influence on the eighteenth century — Lancret — Boucher and Fragonard—How he brought about the abandonment of the Italian tradition, created the art of his century, and made it revert to Rubens—Considerations on the series of consumptive intellects and artists whose genius is akin to Watteau's—Mozart, Bonington, Schubert, Chopin, Keats, Laforgue, Samain, etc.—Conclusions.

IF Watteau's soul, which was moulded in such peculiar circumstances, remained misunderstood by his contemporaries, his technique gained him a place of immense importance.

We may say, indeed, that it created the whole eighteenth century, and remained paramount to the end. Pater and Lancret, his pupils, imitated him without the slightest attempt at individuality. They are soulless Watteaus. De Troy felt his influence; Charles Coypel took hints from the colouring of his flesh tones; Boucher, who understood him not at

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all, admired him, engraved him, and imitated him; Vanloo's Spanish fancies derive from Watteau; Olivier copied him, Fragonard is steeped in him, and in *Le Contrat* and *L'Abandon*, his genius and personality succeeded in resuscitating Watteau's very spirit. Saint Aubin, Cochin, and Portail are haunted by Watteau's characters, and followed his example of drawing in three crayons. Watteau's drawings are only a repertory of the shapes which he idealised, composed, and transfigured in his pictures. But the men of the eighteenth century could not get beyond his drawings, copied them with enthusiasm, and found in them a new mode of expression. They appreciated to the utmost these fascinating works, with their wit, their life, their astonishing technique and no less astonishing feeling. It is because of his drawings that Watteau reigns supreme over his generation; but for him, his own age and the eighty years that followed would have been different indeed.

Watteau, then, is a master essentially representative of French art. From the critic's point of view his work produced three results of the highest importance—he brought about

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the abandonment of Italian tradition, created his century, and made it revert to Rubens, thus guiding French art once more into a direction more logically suited to its genius. He discovered a form of expression which made it possible to abandon once for all the heavy and pompous allegory, the cumbersome and pedantic symbolism of which everyone was weary. And though he lived in seclusion and died young, though he never had the advantage of State commissions, because of the disorganisation of this department during the Regency, yet he put into his work so great a power of innovation that it gave life and sustenance to a whole period. By reverting to Rubens, Watteau was a cause that the masters of Flanders and Holland once more directly influenced Northern French art, which had hitherto been ruled and enslaved by the degenerate traditions of the Italian Renaissance (the school of Fontainebleau). That is to say, that to a certain extent he forged anew the natural links that existed between the Burgundian and Flemish schools, before they were broken by the Renaissance imported from Italy. He was influenced, indeed, by

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Titian and by Veronese, but in no wise by the idols of Le Brun's school, Caraccio, Bernini, or Baroccio. The decline in prestige of the Academic school dates from him. It was only Watteau's existence that made it possible for Boucher to say to Fragonard as he was setting out for Rome: "You are going to see Raphael and the rest; if you take them seriously, you are done for!" If Greuze, in company with his friend the engraver Wille, piously studied the Rubenses in the Luxembourg, it was because Watteau, thirty years before, had delighted in honouring Rubens. In the much needed book that will doubtless some day be written on Rubens' influence on French art, it will not be possible to overlook the fact that the most direct channel by which this influence penetrated into France was through Watteau and his works, and that consequently he was a very important diffusing agent in other countries. In England, Rubens' influence had been propagated by Van Dyck, who founded the English school. Watteau started a kind of secondary school which attached itself to the first, and we may say that, technically, the way for Turner was prepared quite





THE SOUBRETTE (CHANTILLY)

*Photograph, Braun, Clément & Cie, Dornach, Paris, and New York*

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as much by him as by Claude; his mark may be found on Bonington; and finally, when English amateurs welcomed Monticelli at a time when he was ignored in France, they did but hail a reflected gleam of Watteau's inspiration.

After the classical reaction of David and the Empire, Delacroix was the first to understand the powerful originality of the forgotten master's technique. He noticed that Watteau applied the principle of the division of tones and their juxtaposition in order to produce on the eye the sensation of one integral tone—that is to say, the fundamental principle of Impressionism, from a technical point of view. It is to Watteau, indeed, that Impressionism must be traced back. After him, this system was practised by Chardin, and then by Bonington, Turner, Delacroix, and Monticelli. These are the precursors of the art which reached its full development in 1870 with Claude Monet, Manet, and Renoir. Watteau was constantly preoccupied with the difficulty of rendering the atmosphere. He achieved his object by intermingling with all the tonalities of the different parts of a picture,

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touches of one particular tone, of the sky, for instance, so that the same harmony is everywhere recalled ; and, at the same time, while mingling this tone with the other colours, he breaks it up in the subtlest and most capricious of fashions. The works he thus produced were true colour-symphonies, in which one note always predominates, sometimes blue, sometimes pink, sometimes gold, as in *L'Embarquement pour Cythère*, which is a complete impressionist picture. This was his manner of creating what we call "aerial envelope," and he succeeded in it to a wonderful extent. He was not only a great draughtsman of the figure and a physiognomist of much intensity, but also a great landscape painter, deriving from Flemish and Dutch traditions, but transformed by the art of French gardens, as seen at the Luxembourg, at Versailles, at La Muette, and at Montmorency. The qualities he inherited from Ruysdael are enhanced in Watteau by a special charm, the refinement of ill-health ; and landscapes like those of *L'Embarquement pour Cythère*, of *La Fête Champêtre*, and of *L'Assemblée dans un Parc*, count amongst the finest examples of the art. Their truth to

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nature is in striking contrast to the artificiality of the age and to Boucher's landscapes, which are like pieces of tapestry. We get the same quality again in the landscape painters of 1750, in Hubert Robert, in Louthembourg, and in Fragonard's village scenes and red chalk drawings of the Villa d'Este. These painters merely revert in all fidelity to the Flemish and Netherlandish traditions of Ruysdael, Hobbema, and Van Goyen. Watteau's landscapes are models of harmonious and decorative arrangements. But the majesty of his lofty trees, the limpidity of his skies, the mysterious translucency of his horizons, the luxuriant wealth of his vegetation, all combine to produce works which are absolutely true as regards value, tone, and plane. Neither the roving fancy of a dreamer, nor the desire for spirituality, ever lessened Watteau's perception of pictorial reality. He is never affected; he is always realistic. His sites are real, his figures might actually live; and though imaginative, he is not artificial. Caylus, with his usual inability to understand, gives us some interesting details as to his friend's technique. "The places in which he settled down best were in various rooms which I had in different parts of

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Paris, and which we only used for sittings for drawing and painting. In these abodes, entirely consecrated to art, we were free from every interruption, and experienced the unmixed joy of youth, added to a lively imagination and a constant attachment to the charms of painting. I may say that Watteau, who elsewhere was so gloomy, so atrabilious, so caustic and so timid, seemed there like the Watteau of his pictures, that is to say, like the author they suggest, agreeable, tender, perhaps a little pastoral ('berger').” It is difficult to define exactly the meaning of this expression as used by Caylus. The word cannot be transposed from the eighteenth century to ours, and yet those who have read thus far will attach a deeper signification to it than the simple-minded Caylus, who continues:—

“When in these retreats, I recognised to my profit how profound were Watteau’s reflections on the subject of painting, and how inferior his execution was to his ideas. Having, in truth, no knowledge of anatomy, and having hardly ever drawn from the nude, he could neither understand nor express it, and this to such a point, that an academic or nude study cost him infinite pains and was conse-

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quently disagreeable to him. Women's figures, requiring less articulation, he found somewhat easier." We can but laugh as we think of *Autumn* and *Antiope* !

"In particular," continues Caylus, "this incompetence in the practice of drawing put it out of his power to paint or compose either heroic or allegorical subjects, and still more to represent figures of a certain size." (We smile again as we think of the admirable *Sign* and its broad and powerful execution.) "At bottom, we must admit that Watteau was exceedingly mannered." (Nowadays we think the exact contrary, and it appears to us that mannerism and want of true personality lay with the Academicians to whom Caylus read his memoir and who all considered themselves vastly superior to Watteau.) "Notwithstanding the fact that he was endowed with a certain charm and was captivating in his favourite subjects, his hands and heads, and even his landscapes, all suffer from this defect. Taste and effect are his greatest advantages and produce, it is true, an agreeable illusion, inasmuch as his colouring is good and that he paints stuffs accurately and draws them with



STUDY OF A MAN. WATER-COLOUR (CHANTILLY)

*Photograph, Braun, Clément & Cie, Dornach, Paris,  
and New York*



## ANTOINE WATTEAU

*piquancy*. It must be said, indeed, that he never painted any stuff but silk, which falls into innumerable little folds; but his draperies were disposed with skill and the arrangement of the folds was accurate, because he always drew them from nature and never used a lay figure. His choice of the local colouring of his draperies was good and never unharmonious. . . . Watteau, in order to execute his effects more rapidly, preferred to use his paints liquid. This method has always had many partisans and the greatest masters have employed it, but in order to make use of it successfully it is necessary to prepare one's grounds carefully and happily; and this Watteau hardly ever did. . . .

“In order to remedy this omission to a certain extent, he was in the habit, after letting a picture dry, of rubbing it all over indiscriminately with oil, and of repainting over this. The momentary advantage thus gained did his pictures considerable harm in the long run, and this was much increased by a certain slovenliness of habit which must have caused his colours to change. He rarely cleaned his palette, and often went for several



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days without setting it. His pot of oil, which he used so much, was filled with dirt and dust, and mixed with all sorts of colours left by his brushes when he dipped them into it. Idleness and indolence led him into this defect rather than an impatient desire to fling rapidly upon his canvas some effect that he had imagined. This indeed sometimes seized him, but it oftener took the form of wishing to draw." Caylus' judgment here is odd, for Watteau's pictures have aged admirably, and acquired, by reason of this very use of oil, a golden mellowness analogous to that of Rembrandt's. Probably Watteau (it is amazing to hear this prodigious worker accused of idleness) had his own secrets. Gersaint likewise regrets this use of oil, with which Watteau worked over his pictures, executing a kind of carving in the thickness of the paint, and thus giving his canvases, on the warm and luscious foundation he had prepared, a gem-like aspect of richness—a method pushed by Monticelli to the point of making actual reliefs in colour.

"This practice (drawing) had an infinite attraction for him, and though generally the

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figures he drew from nature were for no particular purpose, he had the greatest difficulty in tearing himself away from them. I say that he generally drew without a purpose, for he never made even the slightest or sketchiest draught or design for his pictures. His habit was to make his drawings in a bound book, so that he always had a great number at hand. He had sets of elegant costumes, some of which were comic, and with these he dressed up the persons of both sexes who consented to pose for him; these he drew in the attitudes suggested by nature, taking for choice the simplest." (This contradicts the accusation of mannerism.) "When he desired to paint a picture, he chose out of his collection those figures which suited him best, and formed groups with them, generally as an addition to a background of landscape which he had already imagined or prepared." We see that Watteau actually *invented* all his works like dreams. We understand too why he attached so much importance to his drawings; they formed his single contact with real life, and from them he took the impetus by which he was enabled to soar into regions of spirituality.

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This particular form of spirituality which he introduced into French art, and which constitutes the essential portion of his personality, became the prototype of a whole series of artistic manifestations. Watteau is the first consumptive artist it is possible to study with any certainty as to the relations between his art and his disease—for we know nothing really positive concerning Raphael's psychology from this point of view. Watteau affords us the first complete example of the "maladie de l'infini."

Let there be no mistake. If I associate the word *disease* with the word *consumption*, I do not intend to convey that Watteau's art was *unhealthy*. The term "unhealthy" has been applied to art that has advanced dangerously beyond the limits of the *normal*, and may be produced by persons entirely different from Watteau and untouched by his malady. I should like it to be understood that this word "*disease*" is used here, for want of a better, to express the esoteric meaning of "*morbidezza*." Nothing could be less unhealthy than Watteau's productions; drawing, colour, expression, all are full of knowledge, health,

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and logic, all show the hand of a master. But the body's disease caused a mystic exaltation in the soul, whose productions, far from being touched by debility or decadence, are rather the concentration of extreme power and violent natural emotion. If we consider the art and philosophy produced by great consumptives, we shall see that they are marked by unmistakable health of mind, by a courageous facing of earthly finality, by the love of great enterprises, and by profound self analysis. There exists in intellectual consumptives a condition of mind which seems to concentrate all those perceptions of supreme delicacy conferred on noble minds by the presentiment of approaching death. On the border lands of neurosis and consumption stands a figure who bears the suffering face of Moral Beauty, but whose features science has as yet been unable to define; it was this Beauty that Watteau possessed at the cost of his life.

Since his time it has been found in others : in Bonington and Mozart, in Schubert and Chopin, and Novalis and Keats, and finally in Jules Laforgue and Albert Samain, two recent



THE CONJURER (THE LOUVRE)

*Photograph, Giraudon*

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French poets, whose form and sentiment are of the truest originality. We may add to these Edgar Poe, Heine, Verlaine, and Schumann; for although they did not die of consumption, their neurosis gave them an analogous perception of the "maladie de l'infini." No one has ever understood Watteau as well as Verlaine. His exquisite little volume of poems, "Fêtes Galantes," is an absolute transposition of the painter's work. Monticelli's art connected the eighteenth century master's dream with impressionist technique in the most striking fashion, and the sketches of the illustrious Marseillais painter seem to combine the decorative lyricism of Ariosto with the luxurious melancholy of *L'Embarquement pour Cythère*. In some of M. Claude Debussy's recent pianoforte pieces, pieces which have a subtle charm, this feverish and bizarre follower of Schumann seems to have been thinking of Watteau and to reveal certain of his moods. Lastly, to return, unfortunately, to a consumptive, the singular decorative genius of Aubrey Beardsley (who died lately at the age of twenty-six after a life of the richest promise) was without doubt influenced by

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Watteau. All of these are or were admirable artists; the crystal of their souls rang with a special and peculiar vibration. We must not think of them as weak and sentimental dreamers; they could find sustenance too in a forceful irony. Thus Watteau was inclined to sarcasm; Laforgue created a medley of sobs and laughter which is perhaps unique in the whole of literature; and the landscape of Chopin's despairing passion was traversed by flashes of lightning and rhythms of violence. On the day that Nature created—to destroy so soon—the painter of *L'Embarquement pour Cythère*, on that day the scenery of all these works was determined once and for all. Novalis' metaphysical ingenuity, Chopin's feverish tenderness, Laforgue's tragic smile, Heine's elegance who trails her garments in a cemetery, Albert Samain's lyric caress, Paul Verlaine's languorous evocation of desire, Schubert's pastoral passion, and certain of Poe's landscapes, have their site in that enchanted land whose scenery Watteau distilled from nature, and out of whose suave and azure depths comes a murmur as of *L'Invitation au Voyage*. Mozart's music and Keats' poems in particular have

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affinities to Watteau's genius. But it is not so much a question of resemblance between their works, as of the solidarity acquired by the minds of those who suffer from the most intellectual and the most mysteriously psychic of all illnesses.

Baudelaire, whose art criticisms are perhaps the finest in French prose, understood Watteau's greatness at a moment when it was yet little dreamt of. In a celebrated poem in "*Les Fleurs du Mal*" ("*Les Phares*"), he mentions him amongst the loftiest masters, as one of the "beacons" who illumine by the light of their genius the ages and races of mankind. Watteau was in truth one of these beacons. This young man of sublime powers, whom people took for a simple painter of pastorals, for a "*petit-mâitre*" of graces and gallantries, this young man, by the force of his technique, by the spontaneity of his æsthetic vision, by the supremacy that his art acquired over the period that inspired the latter half of the nineteenth century, was destined to become one of the most nobly representative beings of his race, and we may say that in his work is formulated one of the highest forms of human dreams.



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The mere utterance of his name suffices to evoke in men's minds a memory of the melancholy that was his, arrayed in garments of azure and rose. Ah! crepuscular Psyche, whose smile is akin to tears!

## WORKS TO BE CONSULTED

- “ Vie d’Antoine Watteau, peintre de figures et de paysages, sujets galants et modernes,” par M. le Comte de Caylus, amateur, lue à la séance de l’Académie royale de peinture et de sculpture le 3 février 1748. (Discovered by the brothers de Goncourt and published in their work, “ L’Art du XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle.”)
- “ Catalogue raisonné des diverses curiosités du cabinet de feu M. Quentin de Lorangère,” 1744, par Gersaint.
- “ Abrégé de la vie de Watteau ” (Introduction to the collection of “ Figures de différents caractères,” edited by M. de Julienne, 1735).
- “ Abrégé de la vie des plus fameux peintres,” par d’Argenville.
- “ Abécédario,” par Mariette.
- “ Watteau, son enfance, ses contemporains,” par L. Cellier, Valenciennes, 1867.

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- “Catalogue raisonné de l'œuvre de Watteau,”  
par Edmond de Goncourt, 1875.
- “L'Art du XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle,” par Edmond et  
Jules de Goncourt. In the volume con-  
taining essays on Boucher, Chardin, and  
La Tour (1st series), is a short but brilliant  
essay on “Watteau,” to which is added  
Caylus’ “Life,” and in a second edition,  
after the notes, Edmond de Goncourt  
subjoined an extract from his catalogue  
relating to Watteau’s engravings.
- “Watteau,” by John W. Mollett, London,  
1863.
- “Watteau,” by E. Hanover, Berlin, 1889, trans-  
lated into German from the Danish.
- “Die Ausstellung von Gemälden aelterer  
Meister in Berliner Privatbesitz,” von  
Herren Bode und R. Dohme, Berlin, 1883.
- “Watteau,” par Paul Mantz, Paris, 1892.
- “Watteau,” par Gabriel Séailles, Paris, 1902.
- “Watteau,” by Claude Phillips, London,  
1895.
- “Watteau,” notice by Charles Blanc in his  
“Histoire des Grands Peintres de toutes  
les écoles.”
- “Watteau,” par Virgile Josz, Paris, 1900.

## WORKS TO BE CONSULTED

It goes without saying that we do not here mention all the works that have been written about Watteau, but only the best known—and even these are of unequal value. Caylus' "Life" and Gersaint's and M. de Julienne's notices have an immediate interest which it is easy to understand, and we have drawn upon them largely. M. Cellier's volume is valuable as regards Watteau's childhood, but it is written by a native of Valenciennes with a somewhat special intention, and is not concerned with art. The Goncourts' essay is merely a rapid sketch, and their eulogium, though just, does not sufficiently recognise the importance of the master's influence over his century. The catalogue drawn up by Edmond de Goncourt is of far other calibre, and is a document that is final. Virgile Josz's book is written by an artist, brilliantly, but with too great a tendency to arrange events according to the dictates of a romantic fancy—a graceful and amusing work, but untrustworthy. M. Gabriel Séailles' study, though destined to appear in a small series, and confining itself to general information, is very accurate, very comprehensive, and very much in harmony with the spirit of his subject.

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The same cannot be said of that of M. Paul Mantz, an official critic of reputation, whose judgments are imbued with the most highly contestable academic taste. As regards foreigners, I may say that there are some extremely interesting remarks in the work of MM. Bode and Dohme, although they attribute to Watteau and Gillot certain "singeries" at Chantilly which, as M. Séailles has pointed out, were painted much later by an imitator. M. Dohme gives an excellent chronological classification of Watteau's works. M. Hanover's book is highly intelligent and meritorious. I am unacquainted with Mr Mollett's, but truth compels me to say that Mr Staley's recent work, which has come under my notice, is full of inaccuracies; notwithstanding the charm of its style, it has no sort of historical value, and is of such a nature as to give the English public an extraordinary idea of a French master who is a special favourite in England. M. Téodor de Wyzewa has made it his task to point out the principal errors of this work ("Revue des Deux Mondes," September 1903). Walter Pater, in his "Imaginary Portraits," had already made

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Watteau and his work the subject of the most whimsical interpretation. But Pater, whom no one admires more sincerely than ourselves, justified his sparkling fancies by the title of his book ; he made no pretence of producing an historical work, and still less of writing for the benefit of the general public, to whom at least broad facts are due, though discussions of detail may be suitable for the more limited circle of art lovers.

If a sense of duty and honesty did not condemn the fabrication of romances out of a man's life and their presentation as realities, as has been done occasionally by Virgile Josz and only too often by Mr Staley (whom I have assuredly no personal reasons for criticising), good sense should suffice to show us that the essential point is the artist's work itself and his character. Those who consult the list of books given above should do so, not with the object of finding unpublished biographical details, but only in order to seek appreciations of the style, spirit, and composition of Watteau's work and of his historical place in the French school ; nothing else is necessary. It may be safely asserted that the reading of criticism is

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useless, unless it increase the reader's keenness of comprehension and feeling, even though it should pile up any number of little anecdotes, which may serve to promote discussion between book-worms, but not to enlighten, to explain, or to fathom the mysterious reasons that control the creation of a work of art. I have already said that the scope and purpose of the present book require me to limit myself to a repetition of what we know for certain as to Watteau's life. In drawing to a close, I repeat that what we know is not much; this is no reason, however, for artificial amplification. Caylus, Gersaint, and Julienne are our only sources. I have therefore confined myself to what they have to tell us; outside of this, all is conjecture. But we possess Watteau's works, some details as to his personal character, and a knowledge of the very special kind of illness of which he died. If this does not suffice for seekers after detailed information, it is all that is needed for persons of feeling and intelligence. As a matter of fact, if we do not know much, it is because there is not much to know about a man who vegetated in poverty and obscurity, who worked enormously, and who, when he was

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recognised, lived a retired and austere life. Erudition loses its rights over existences such as these, which are almost exclusively internal, and psychology and love of art succeed to them.



## NOTES

WATTEAU executed a few etchings; their workmanship was summary and they are to-day undiscoverable; the Goncourts mention eight of them, which must not be confounded with the etchings done by the engravers Thomassin and Simonneau after some of Watteau's sketches.

Besides the 350 studies engraved and edited by M. de Julienne in his "*Figures de différents caractères*,"<sup>1</sup> Watteau's marvellous drawings, which he produced in innumerable quantities, are dispersed more or less in every direction. The British Museum possesses eighteen of them and the Louvre thirty-one; there are some also at the Albertina of Vienna. In the

<sup>1</sup>The engravings were done by Trémolières, Basan, Silvestre, Cochin, and in particular by Boucher, who, at the beginning of his career, executed 125 of them, and was paid by M. de Julienne 24 livres a day for this work.

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eighteenth century the drawings belonged for the most part to Crozat, M. de Julienne, the Chevalier de la Roque, Gersaint, Mariette, d'Argenville, and Henin, who were almost all intimate friends of the painter's. Watteau drew a few comic scenes, in particular, *Painting* and *Sculpture* in the form of monkeys; *Le Départ pour les Iles*, a caricature representing "filles de joie"; *Le Chat Malade*, a young woman showing her cat to a ridiculous old doctor (engraved by Liotard). Watteau several times ridiculed doctors, from whose ignorance he had no doubt suffered. There exists in particular a drawing of this kind representing a doctor surrounded by tombs and skulls (executed in London and engraved by Pound in 1739); there are also the sketches which he did at Nogent, almost on his death-bed, representing the faculty with a pack saddle and this expressive legend, "What have I done, accursed assassins?"

We possess a portrait of Watteau by Crespy; one by Boucher; one by Oppenort on the reverse of the title-page of "Figures de différents caractères"; and finally in this same collection of M. de Julienne's is a print after a drawing

## NOTES

catalogued in the collection La Roque, *Watteau laughing, done by himself*—a real portrait of a consumptive, frightfully thin, almost death-like.

Watteau's finest works are at the Louvre, in London, at the Albertina of Vienna, at Dresden, at the Hermitage of St Petersburg, in Edinburgh, and finally at Potsdam in the collection of the German Emperor, who possesses in particular the final version of *L'Embarquement pour Cythère*, *Gersaint's Sign*, *Le Concert*, *L'Amour à la Campagne*, and *La Danse*, a priceless collection which France had the opportunity of beholding once more at the great Exhibition of 1900. The Berlin Picture Gallery possesses a *Déjeuner*, a *Fête Galante*, *L'Amour au théâtre italien*, and *L'Amour au théâtre français*. The *Mezzetin* is at the Hermitage, the *Fête Champêtre* in Edinburgh, *La Réunion en plein air*, and *L'Amusement champêtre* in the Dresden Gallery. The Louvre has kept the sketch for *L'Embarquement pour Cythère*, *La Finette*, *L'Indifférent*, *L'Assemblée dans le Parc*, *Gilles*, *L'Automne*, *Antiope*, *Le Faux Pas*, and a *Réunion*, besides the drawings in chalks of three colours.



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